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THE MAN OF MANY DISGUISES!

JOE PHENIX, PRIVATE DETECTIVE; or, The League of the Skeleton Keys.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN FROM NEW YORK," "THE SPOTTER DETECTIVE," "THE NEW YORK SHARP," "OVERLAND KIT," "INJUN DICK," ETC.



"DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF THAT WE HAVE NOT PENETRATED YOUR DISGUISE. WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE JOE PHENIX."

The Man of Many Disguises!

Joe Phenix,

PRIVATE DETECTIVE;

OR,

The League of the Skeleton Keys.

A most unnatural, improbable story of life in our modern Babylon, New York, and yet as true as truth itself; a story of hidden crime—of the dark serpent that lies in wait behind the shadow of society, hidden by a screen of lies, ready to prey on youth, innocence and wealth; a story of highways and byways; of Satanic-like rascals and of the secret agents of the law, who, shadow-like, follow ever on the trail of guilt.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY,"
"THE WITCHES OF NEW YORK," "THE
ACE OF SPADES," "OVERLAND
KIT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SUICIDE OR MURDER?

Now come ye fates and furies fell.—OLD PLAY.

THERE was death in the house; the owner thereof lay cold and still in a rich casket placed in the center of the gorgeously-furnished parlor, where, but a few short weeks ago, a gay party of city visitors had complimented the master of Calderwood Hall upon the superb place which he possessed.

And who was the dead man, the news of whose untimely taking off created a sensation both in Wall street, New York, and in the fashionable circles up-town?

Ethelwold Calderwood he was called, a man of thirty-five or thereabouts, forty perhaps, for he was one of those peculiar men who seldom carry their age in their faces. He was an Englishman by birth, and had only dwelt in New York for two years.

There was a little bit of mystery about the man—just enough to excite curiosity. He had brought letters of introduction to some of the best people in the city, and as he was apparently possessed of abundant means, New York received him with open arms. But Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood was somewhat reserved in regard to his family relations in the old country. Very often he would begin to tell how he had done such and such a thing in England—had been to the races in company with the Prince of Wales, shared the Duke of Edinburgh's box at the opera, shot with young Lorne on the Scottish moors and performed other feats in company with the highest men in the United Kingdom, and yet, when questioned as to how he, a gentleman without rank, had been on such intimate terms with such men, he had laughed and replied that he had good friends in high life who stood his sponsors.

And so the fashionable gossips in New York soon came to the conclusion that Calderwood was more than he seemed. He was either the heir to a title, or else, perhaps, a favored son, across whose coat-of-arms the bar sinister must be placed. Legitimately or illegitimately he was evidently a man of rank, and some of his intimate acquaintances discovered that his handkerchiefs, in the corners, were ornamented with a spray of strawberry leaves, and those Anglo-Americans learned in the art of heraldry understood that this was the badge of an earl.

In person Calderwood was a typical Englishman, tall, straight, blue eyes, blonde hair, which he wore curled in tiny little ringlets all over his head, full and luxuriant beard, soft as silk and daintily parted at the middle of the chin; soft white hands, with the most beautiful fingernails imaginable, a regular lady's hand, "too sweet for anything," to use the ladies' popular phrase. Calderwood, too, was as well-bred a man as ever stepped foot in a lady's parlor, a perfect gentleman in every respect, although some envious ones declared that he had altogether too soft a way with him, and that so much polish concealed a defect; but the tongue of censure was always.

For the joke of the thing, as he said, the Englishman allowed himself to be introduced to the mysteries of the Stock Exchange, but to the surprise of some of his introducers, who secretly "hankered" after a chance to "clean" the Englishman out, they discovered that Calderwood was by no means such a greenhorn as he was taken for, and that, soft and easy as he appeared to be, he was no man's pigeon to be plucked at leisure.

In fact, as a stock-operator the Englishman was a success, and it was estimated that since he had gone into Wall street he had made a hundred thousand dollars at the very least.

Everything he did was on a great scale. In New York he had a suit of rooms at the Fifth Avenue Hotel; for the summer he built an elegant country seat at the Highlands down in Jersey, right on the west of the hill above the

twin lights—a regular old English mansion of the time of Queen Ann. The site was superb, commanding a view of New York bay, the Navesink and Shrewsbury rivers, the summer cities of Seabright and Long Branch, and the great Atlantic ocean, just over the strip of silver sand extending from Sandy Hook inland.

No finer country seat was there in situation, and none more sumptuously fitted up, in all the region tributary to the greatest city of the New World.

I have spoken at length of the man, described his person, his ways and establishment, although we commence our story by stating that he reposed within the cold confines of a casket-coffin; yet, though the telegraph had borne the news of Calderwood's death far and wide, Calderwood, dead, will play as important a part in the extremely strange tale which I have taken upon myself to transcribe, as any living character whose actions I shall be obliged to relate.

As we have said, in the parlor rested the coffin solitary and alone, no watcher near. But in the dining-room, right back of the parlor, sat the man at present in charge of Calderwood Hall.

It was night—the spring of the year, but the coy and gentle maiden still lingered in the lap of winter, and fires indoors were absolutely necessary; so in the elaborate grate—no common stoves would answer for Calderwood—a brisk coal-fire burnt.

John Allister, this man was called. He was not young, nor yet old, forty perhaps, stout and strong as a bull, a good specimen of the beef-fed Englishman; he had iron-gray hair, a heavy and rugged face, and although dressed with scrupulous care, yet there was something about him that, to the experienced eye, would have suggested that Mr. John Allister had not always occupied as pleasant a position as the one he now held.

Allister had come with Calderwood from England, and the master of the mansion, often, in speaking about his confidential man, had declared that he was the truest and best fellow in the world, and that he would trust him with uncounted gold.

Now Calderwood lay cold and still, and Allister, sitting in the next room to where the coffin was placed, was sipping the English gentleman's natural drink, brandy and soda, with a very great relish.

The curtains were drawn tightly down, the fierce west wind whistled without, making the old Jersey pines sigh with almost human voices, but the man within sipped, and chuckled, and rubbed his hands together every now and then in an extremely gleeful manner.

Suddenly the door opened; Allister looked up in surprise, evidently not expecting to be disturbed; a lady entered, and it was plain from the expression upon the face of the man that she was both an unexpected and an unwelcome visitor.

The lady was tall, strong-faced, rather pretty, for she had fine eyes, fine hair and regular features; her eyes were gray, the color of the hair brown, and she had a proud, imperious way with her.

This was Miss Helen Lodgega, the housekeeper of the mansion.

Calderwood's establishment had consisted of Allister, his confidential man of business, Miss Lodgega, the housekeeper, two colored servants, and a coachman who acted as gardener also.

A week before our story opens Miss Lodgega had solicited leave of absence for a month to attend to some important business in the South, and therefore Allister was surprised to see her return so soon.

Miss Lodgega was a new-comer; she had only been in the Hall for a month before she went away. She had brought excellent recommendations and had given most complete satisfaction. As she had explained to Mr. Calderwood, sore misfortune alone had forced her to earn her living, as she was a lady born and bred.

But between Miss Lodgega and Allister there had never been any liking; each distrusted the other, although neither of them could have given a reason for the sentiment.

"Why, Miss Lodgega, you surprise me!" Allister exclaimed, the first to speak. "I had no idea of seeing you so soon."

The lady did not answer for a moment; she sat down by the table without removing her things and looked with strange, anxious eyes at the man.

Allister did not like the scrutiny, as was plainly apparent from the expression upon his face.

"I had not yet started on my journey South," she explained; "I was in New York; but, although the news of the dreadful event here was in last evening's newspapers, I did not happen to hear of it until after dinner to-day. I was almost stunned by the shock; and yet I had no right to be, for I was warned; a load has been on my heart ever since I left the house. I caught the last train and got a carriage at Midletown to bring me over. Now tell me the truth, John Allister, tell me the truth if you can: Did Ethelwold Calderwood commit suicide or was he murdered?"

"What an idea!" cried Allister, with a laugh, evidently forced. "He died a natural death."

"It is false!" she retorted, fiercely. "There has been foul play here. I am Ethelwold Calderwood's wife, and I will ferret out the truth!"

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S OATH.

An expression of blank amazement appeared upon the face of the man at this announcement; that he was both surprised and annoyed was apparent.

"You are Mr. Calderwood's wife?" he observed, slowly, after quite a long pause; the sentence was merely spoken to afford him time to collect his thoughts.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Ethelwold Calderwood," she repeated, firmly, and from the manner in which she looked upon the man it was evident that she believed he would dispute her right to the title.

"I am really astounded!" he exclaimed emphatically, and he leaned back in his chair and looked the woman earnestly in the face.

She bore the scrutiny unflinchingly, meeting him eye to eye.

"We were married two weeks ago—secretly married in New York—"

"Why, then you had only known Mr. Calderwood two weeks!"

"Very true; Mr. Calderwood proposed to marry me before I had been six days in this house—"

"A case of love at first sight, eh?" the man remarked, a slight sneer perceptible in his face.

"Mr. Calderwood was not a boy, but a man who had reached the years of discretion, and when he found that he fancied me, he was honest enough to tell me so. I was afraid of his love, although I had learned to like him, little as I knew of him. I begged him to let me go away. I was all alone in the world, no friend to advise me, and I really distrusted myself. He calmed my fears and told me that if I remained he would make me his wife. I listened, and at last yielded to his wishes. I will not conceal from you, Mr. Allister, that I was intoxicated with joy at the very thought of winning such a man as Mr. Calderwood. We arranged to meet in New York, and we were married there at the minister's house. Mr. Calderwood explained to me that there were certain reasons why a secret marriage was advisable. I did not question him as to what those reasons were, for I had faith, and I fully trusted him, but you doubtless know."

"What, I?" Allister responded, apparently greatly surprised. "Oh, no; I haven't the least idea. As far as I know there wasn't the slightest reason why he should not have married you openly, if he desired to marry you at all."

"You do not doubt, then, that he did marry me?" the woman asked, quickly and searchingly, as if she expected he would both doubt and deny it.

"Why should I doubt?" he replied, with an appearance of great frankness. "You say that you were married, and, Miss Lodgega, I have altogether too good an opinion of your shrewdness to believe that you would make such a statement unless you were able to back it up with positive proofs."

"You are quite right, and to be honest with you, Mr. Allister, although I feel sure that you are no friend of mine, for I am certain that you took a dislike to me the very first time you saw me, yet I am positive you do not underrate what little ability I am gifted with by nature."

"No, madam, you are not wrong there," the man remarked, very slowly and reflectively. "I will frankly admit that I thought you were a dangerous woman, and if Mr. Calderwood had done me the honor to ask my advice on the subject, I should most certainly have advised him not to admit you into this house. And, now, madam, I perceive that my suspicion was correct, for, in the short space of two weeks, you succeeded in entrapping him into a marriage—"

The woman made an indignant gesture, but Allister stopped the angry reply with a wave of his hand.

"Suffer me to finish, Miss Lodgega, if you please. I am merely looking at the matter from my stand-point—using plain words, perhaps, but it is as well that you and I should understand each other, which we cannot do if we beat about the bush. I say that you entrapped Mr. Calderwood into a marriage, for no other term, to my mind, will express it, knowing, as I do, that Mr. Calderwood was about as good as engaged to one of the wealthiest heiresses in New York. Not only an heiress to all her father's wealth, three or four millions at the least, but worth in her own right nearly a million, and with all due respect to your personal charms, Miss Lodgega, you cannot compare with this lady in face, form, charm of mind or person, any more than a plain, rugged, weather-beaten man like myself could with such an Adonis as Mr. Calderwood. Then, too, she is in all the freshness of youth, barely turned twenty-one, while, if I am not wrong in my guess, you are, at least, thirty, and you have been married."

The lady winced for a moment as though she had received a blow.

"Mr. Calderwood told you that," she observed, her face stern and hard, ugly lines appearing about her mouth.

"Mr. Calderwood never did me the honor to mention your name to me, in any way, shape or manner, nor I to him, although I should have taken that liberty, presuming on the fact of my long service, if I had had the slightest suspicion that matters between you and he were as they were."

Miss Lodoga looked at the speaker earnestly, and even her suspicious soul came to the conclusion that he was speaking the truth.

"I cannot very well explain to you how it was I got the idea into my head that you were married, except it was from the judgment which comes with years. I saw by your face that you were no young girl; I read there that you had had care and suffering, and so I judged you had been married."

"You were right—I am thirty—I have been married—married when a child of sixteen to a base scoundrel who wrecked all my young life, and then deserted me!" the woman exclaimed, her voice hoarse with passion.

"My dear Miss Lodoga, spare me these particulars; I have no right—no wish to pry into your secrets."

"They were no secrets to Mr. Calderwood; he knew all before he married me!"

"That was very honorable of you indeed; I took you for an adventuress who would conceal anything of that sort."

The placid tone in which he spoke irritated the woman more than the purport of the words.

"Whatever I have been I am now the lawful widow of the late owner of this mansion!" she retorted, "and I have come to claim my rights—to pry into the mystery of this sudden death, and to avenge my husband if he has been foully dealt with, but you, I presume, will attempt to thwart me."

"I? Good heavens! why should I?" cried Allister, looking at the woman with astonishment expressed on every feature of his face. "I have nothing to do with the matter. I was Mr. Calderwood's confidential man of business. He paid me liberally and kindly remembered my faithful services in his will."

"His will? He left a will?"

"Yes, madam, and that was about all that he did leave," Allister replied, dryly. "And that is one reason why this marriage with you astonishes me. Mr. Calderwood was on the brink of ruin, so to speak; by a series of unlucky investments his fortune was swept away until everything was gone but this mansion, which is mortgaged with all its contents for about what it is worth, and a few thousand dollars in bank-stock."

"Oh, this is utterly ridiculous! Mr. Calderwood could not have lost all! How about the family estates in England—the estates which one day would have come to him?"

"Ah, then, he confided his secret to you?" Allister exclaimed, eagerly, betraying a great deal of interest. "I was in hopes that he would speak to me before he died, but he did not."

"No, I am not acquainted with it; but from what I have heard him say—from what I have heard others say, I know that his family in England are very wealthy and that he is a direct heir."

"It is a very mysterious matter," Allister observed, thoughtfully; "the will is very short, and does not mention any English matters at all, except that the executor, appointed, to whom I was directed to cable the news of the death, was in England."

"And not a word about his marriage to me?"

"Yes, a reference to you which, now that you have explained about this secret marriage, I understand partly, although the condition imposed upon you is a mystery. But I have the rough draft of the will here, and you shall judge for yourself."

He drew the paper out of his pocket-book and began:

"First he directs his lawful debts to be paid and his funeral expenses; then the balance he bequeaths to his brother, Marmaduke Calderwood, of London, England, his executor—his heir, subject to the following legacies: first, to my humble self the sum of one thousand dollars in cash; second, to you, provided that you sign away all claims against him or his estates, the sum of five thousand dollars in bank-stock, the money to remain as now invested, and the interest to be paid to you semi-annually, with the further condition that you take up your residence in the Southern States, and the legacy to be forfeited if during the term of your life you cross Mason and Dixon's line, and if so forfeited to be paid to me or my heirs. That is all; I could not understand it at the time, and I ventured to ask him his reason for so strange a clause and he replied that you were a Southerner by birth, and you would surely die if you remained in the North. Of course I did not ask why he gave the money, for it was his, and it was none of my business."

"State the manner of his death, please."

"He was taken sick the night before, having taken a violent cold; the doctors were

and as he seemed to be sinking fast they advised him to prepare for the worst. He made his will, grew fainter and fainter, and at last sunk into a troubled sort of sleep from which he never awoke."

"It could not have been suicide, for the doctors would surely have detected if he had taken a drug," she observed.

"We had the ablest men in the county, three from Red Bank, and they called in a celebrated New York doctor who has a country seat at Shrewsbury."

"Not suicide—no, not suicide, but murder!" she exclaimed.

"My dear Miss Lodoga, I fear that this sad calamity has disordered your reason a little; the idea is absurd!"

"It is the truth! there has been foul play, and the perpetrators of the deed knew that I was Calderwood's wife. Why am I obliged to live in the South? Simply because they fear that if I remain in New York, in time I will unravel this dreadful mystery, and so I will! I swear it here on my knees! I renounce this bequest—I will not sign away my rights—I will fight boldly for what is mine, and, so help me Heaven, I will not know rest or peace until I have penetrated to the very heart of this dread mystery and dragged to the gallows the men who planned the death of Ethelwold Calderwood!"

And upon her knees, with uplifted hands, she mutely called upon the just God of vengeance to register the oath.

Could the body of the Englishman, lying so cold and still within the rigid embrace of the silk-lined casket in the next room, have overheard the words, it would have fairly turned in the coffin.

CHAPTER III.

A VOICE FROM THE TOMB.

THE funeral rites were over; the body of the master of Calderwood Hall was deposited in the burial plot which only a short time ago he had purchased in the pretty rural cemetery a few miles from the Highlands, known as Fairview.

The neighbors had turned out in full force to do the last act of service they could perform toward the rich New Yorker, who had been universally liked. He paid like a prince for all services, and always had a kind word and a pleasant smile, no upstart airs or domineering dignity, and there wasn't a man in the neighborhood but what had a good word for him.

As more than one had remarked, it was easy to see that he was born to wealth.

According to the custom of the region, the doctor in his buggy headed the funeral train; then came the hearse, and then Miss Lodoga and John Allister in the dead man's costly carriage; the private conveyances of the neighbors brought up the rear.

Although a special notification of the funeral had been sent to the New York millionaire, of whom Allister had spoken, yet neither that gentleman nor his daughter appeared.

Allister was not well acquainted with this millionaire, of course, and therefore was not aware that the New Yorker had some remarkable likes and dislikes, and above all a particular aversion to funerals and to all things appertaining to death; therefore he did not come.

Dust to dust and ashes to ashes! The brief funeral service was performed, and heavily the clouds began to fall upon the coffin which contained the mortal remains of Ethelwold Calderwood.

Miss Lodoga, whose eyes were everywhere, discovered two veiled ladies in attendance who were a complete puzzle to her.

Both had come in carriages—one in a hack, evidently a hired vehicle from some livery stable, and the other in a buggy driven by a rough-looking fellow, plainly a Jerseyman, native and to the manor born.

Neither one seemed to know the other; both were so thickly veiled that it was impossible for any one to distinguish their faces, and each evidently shrunk from observation.

"Strangers—from New York, perhaps," Miss Lodoga commented, communing with herself as she stood by the side of the grave, "but what had they to do with Ethelwold that they come to sorrow over his remains?"

When the funeral rites were over, the two mysterious ladies were the first to leave the spot; Miss Lodoga was not the only one who had noticed them; the old gray-haired doctor, who knew almost everybody, had had his attention attracted to the two, and the lady, perceiving this, took occasion to ask if he knew them.

"No, they are strangers—from the city probably, for the hack is from the Globe Hotel stables and the buggy from Atkins's."

"I ought to know who they are and why they come here," she muttered to herself, "but it is not possible, unless by accident."

Taking advantage of Allister being engaged in conversation with the minister, Miss Lodoga spoke hurriedly to the chief grave-digger.

"I want to see you on some very particular business, this evening," she said, and she slipped a five-dollar bill into his hand. "I will meet you at Hedden's Corner at eight o'clock to-night. I will drive over; be sure to come,

for I will make it worth your while; and mind, don't breathe a word of this to any one."

The grave-digger nodded; he was rather a surly chap and not apt to gossip much.

An understanding had been entered into between the lady and Allister; everything was to remain exactly as it was until the brother of the dead man arrived from England.

After the funeral Allister and the lady returned to the Hall together, but upon arriving there, Allister found a letter awaiting him, and upon perusing it he said that important business required his presence in New York, and that he would start immediately so as to catch the last train up.

The woman secretly rejoiced at this, for it afforded her a chance to carry out the scheme she had in view, unobserved.

Allister departed, and after supper, Miss Lodoga had one of the horses harnessed to the buggy, pretending that she wished to send an important dispatch to New York.

But she did not seek any telegraph-office; on the contrary, she drove direct to Hedden's Corner.

There, as per appointment, she found the grave-digger waiting for her.

Briefly she made known to him what she wanted. She declared that she had a terrible fear that the body of the dead man would be stolen from the grave, and she wanted him to watch it for a week or so.

Naturally the old grave-digger declared that there wasn't the slightest danger of such a thing happening; he had followed his trade for a great number of years and he had never heard of such a thing; there wasn't any medical college in the neighborhood, and therefore no opportunity to dispose of "subjects."

But, the lady was firm in her belief, and as she backed up her opinion by offering to pay the man five dollars a night for every night that he watched, he gladly accepted the job.

It was arranged that he was to commence his task that very night, and he was cautioned not to reveal what he was about to a single soul.

So the pair parted; the lady to return to the lonely house on the Highlands, the man to prepare for his vigil, for he had been warned by her to arm himself, so as to be able to scare the night marauders away if they did come.

As she drove along in the dark, the lady laughed to herself in fierce joy.

"The first step is taken!" she exclaimed. "If there has been foul play Allister knows of it—has had a hand in it. He has gone now to warn his confederates that I will not be bribed by the paltry five thousand dollars. I scent the trick. I believe that there has been murder done, and if so, the proof will be in the body. Therefore to cover up all traces of the crime, the body must be removed. If there is an attempt made to steal the body it is proof positive that there has been foul play. But, who is to gain by this? For what reason has the deed been done?" The woman reflected for quite a long time; it was indeed a most difficult question—one quite beyond her solution.

"Perhaps this man—this brother that comes across the sea, and yet, Ethelwold spoke in the most affectionate terms of him. It is a riddle—he was a riddle. He loved me, madly; I infatuated him, as I tried—as I intended to do when I entered this house; he married me; I triumphed, and now the fruits of my victory are rudely snatched from me. Is it fate or man's device?"

She had asked a question which time alone could answer.

At ten o'clock that night, the old grave-digger—his name was Thomas Conover by the way—took his way to the pretty rural cemetery.

The night was dark, inclined to be stormy, and the everlasting north-west wind, that in the winter and early springtime sweeps almost constantly over the country that lies between Raritan bay and the Navesink river, was bitter and cold.

"It will be a nasty night," the old man muttered, "and I don't much relish this job, and it's all in my eye, this here body-snatching; I never heard of no sitch thing done here!"

But, although the old servitor was firm in his belief, yet he had taken the lady's advice and equipped himself for rough work. He carried a bull's-eye lantern, a stout cudgel, a sort of compromise between a club and a stick, and a seven-shooter; also a horse-blanket.

He reached the cemetery at last and proceeded at once to the grave where the mortal remains of Ethelwold had been deposited that day.

The night was quite dark and it was almost impossible to distinguish objects fifty feet away, and at just about that distance from the grave was a little clump of Norway spruces, slender things, recently put in, but large enough to, in a measure, provide shelter for a single man.

Behind the bushes the grave-digger crept, pulled the blanket around him, and prepared to make himself as comfortable as possible.

Slowly the hours passed away, the watcher had begun to doze; it was after midnight, when he was suddenly aroused by sounds which seemed to indicate that there were others besides himself in the cemetery.

He peered forth, and, dense as was the gloom,

fancied that he could distinguish dark forms gathered around the grave where the body had been placed that day.

He was careful not to make a sound to alarm the night marauders, for he wanted to catch them in the very act; armed as he was with the seven-shooter he had no doubt that he could succeed in capturing some one of them, perhaps two. The old fellow was gifted with bull-dog courage, and being as strong as an ox was more than a match for two ordinary men.

Then a voice spoke:

"Dig here, my bones are not more than five feet deep!"

The hair of the grave-digger fairly stood on end. *The voice was the voice of Ethelwold Calderwood.*

There was no mistake; Conover was well acquainted with the Englishman and had passed some time o' day with him a hundred times.

It was Calderwood that spoke if ever he spoke in this world.

The man felt that he would die of terror if he remained quiet—so, with a yell, he rushed forward.

There were dark figures standing around the new-made grave; but, whether mortals or spirits, Conover never found out, for, as he dashed in among them endeavoring to seize one of the dark figures, he received a violent blow on the head, and with a groan he sunk down helpless, senseless, on the earth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNKNOWN SAILOR.

SOME twenty-five years ago there was a certain part of New York which was notorious throughout the length and breadth of our country, and its peculiar fame had even spread to foreign lands.

It is of the Five Points we speak, a sink of darkness and of crime, peopled by humans bad as savages, and, in fact, but little above the level of wild beasts.

Twenty-five years have wrought great changes in New York.

The Five Points was a plague-spot—a cancer eating into the vitals of the city, and, with the keen knife of improvement, the authorities essayed to cut it out.

The old brewery, the head-quarters of crime, vanished, and a mission-house for Gospel work replaced it; Worth street was cut through and widened, and so the Five Points was "stamped out" by the strong arm of law.

But the crime of a great city is like running water; it is matter—it exists; dam it up and head it off in one direction and it breaks out in another.

The destruction of this haunt of crime did not destroy the crime itself—it only scattered it.

And, even now, despite these severe and high-handed measures, in the neighborhood of the old spot the children of evil—the outcasts of society linger, and if any man doubts it, let him array himself in his best, display the outward signs of wealth, and at twelve o' the night walk through Baxter street, from Chatham to Grand—if he dares!

If he is not molested in the passage, it will be because detectives are in the street after some hunted man, and the birds of prey are wary, or else fortune smiles on the bold adventurer as she seldom smiles in that region.

To this savage jungle, peopled by human beasts, right in the heart of the great city, the reader now must go.

It was near midnight, and on the corner of Worth and Baxter street stood a tall and powerful man; he was dressed roughly, poorly, in a sort of semi sailor garb; his face, too, was bronzed, his hands discolored, and upon the back of one of them a star was traced in India ink. Little golden rings were in his ears; his face was smoothly-shaven, excepting that the beard had been allowed to grow like a fringe under the chin, after the fashion common to some parts of Ireland; his hair was quite long and coarse, and evidently innocent of comb and brush. Altogether, he was about as ugly-looking a customer as one could have discovered, search the dens of sin in New York from end to end.

The man was a new-comer in this low region; he had only dwelt in Baxter street for four or five days, but already he had distinguished himself by thrashing the greatest bully in the street, and from the peculiar reserve he exhibited in regard to who and what he was, the knowing ones had come to the conclusion that he was a fugitive from justice, perhaps for crimes committed across the water, perhaps for a hasty blow struck on ship-board. He was evidently short of money, and desperate enough to do anything to fill his pockets again.

At the low lodging-house where he stopped, the "County Clare House,"—lodgings five cents, meals five, too—he had in a quiet way asked if none of the lads knew of a good job for a fellow to get onto, a job that would pay well, no matter what it was, nor how dangerous, provided that the swag was sufficient.

At first the birds of evil omen looked askance, for it is their nature to suspect a detective in disguise in every stranger, but some of the seed had fallen on fruitful soil, and when the stran-

ger, who had said that his name was Robert Cragan, had, in a desperate mood, tempted fortune at one of the low gambling dens in the street, and had been thoroughly cleaned out, as he quitted the den with a hearty curse at his evil fortune, and an exclamation that he'd be hanged if he would not get square with some one for his bad luck before morning, one of the men in the place followed him.

This man was one of the celebrated characters of the Rue de Baxter—well known, too, to the police—so much so, that at the police headquarters, in Mulberry street, his picture was preserved with uncommon care, and when a particularly clever crime was committed, especially in the bank line, the first thing the chief of the detective force said to his fellows was:

"Find Henri de Centrell, Red Henri, and see if he hadn't something to do with this trick!"

A very eminent man, indeed, in certain circles was this personage.

He was a foreigner—a Frenchman, a Communist he claimed, who had been obliged to fly from France on account of his Red Republican principles, hence the name Red Henri, for he was one of the men who advocated blood and slaughter, an equal division of all property, one man as good as another, if not better.

In person, the Frenchman was about the medium height, quite stout, though very graceful, with dainty little hands and feet, and the bearing of a dancing-master; a perfectly Gallic face, high cheek-bones, jet-black eyes, that glittered like beads, a mustache and imperial, after the Napoleonic fashion, black as a crow and carefully waxed.

This man was "no chicken," but of an uncertain age; he might be thirty or he might be fifty—his face was no guide. He was always queerly dressed—big baggy pantaloons, apparently twice too large for him, a threadbare velvet coat and vest, and a high-crowned soft felt hat, the correct pattern for Red Republican wear.

Red Henri was one of the lions of the low dens where the outcast and outlaws of the great city congregated. He was as strong as a bull almost, and although not much of a boxer, his well known readiness to use a knife on the slightest provocation made him both respected and feared.

Two different reputations the Frenchman bore; to the world at large he was simply a visionary dreamer—a spouter about the "rights of man," a fellow who contrived to pick up a living by keeping a little restaurant in one of the side streets in what may be aptly termed the French quarter, near Broadway, a pig-headed rascal, who, in the time of strikes and general discontent among the working classes, might become dangerous.

But the detectives who watched over the peace and property of the great city, regarded him in quite a different light; to them he was a desperate and determined rogue—a rogue with brains, of wonderful skill and cunning; one of those pariahs who pass a lifetime in successfully breaking and defying the law. They knew that his Red Republicanism was but a pretense—his restaurant but a cloak; read aside the screen of lies, and the bank-robber, the check-forgery, the gigantic chief in crime stood revealed.

In fact, for a long time the police authorities had been of the opinion that the Frenchman was one of a band of rogues leagued together to defy the law; they believed that a secret organization existed, with wide-spread ramifications, some of its members even on the police-force—in the detective corps itself, perhaps, and that some very remarkable crimes which had been committed lately, and which had baffled all the skill of the officers to trace home to the perpetrators, was the work of this secret criminal league, in which they were sure Red Henri held a prominent position, if, indeed, he was not the chief of the band.

The best detective skill of the police department was at fault; in fact, the superintendent declared that there was only one man who could ferret out the secret of the league, and that was he who had succeeded in destroying a similar band—Joe Phenix.

But, Phenix was not now in the detective force. He had set up a private detective office and was employing himself on private business.

And now that we have explained who the man was that followed the desperate sailor from the saloon, we will proceed to relate what happened.

The sailor stood moodily, outside, his hands thrust into his now empty pockets.

The Frenchman coming up from the basement purposely jostled him. The sailor turned upon him, quick as a flash.

"Don't 'ee do that ag'in!" he cried, "or I'll take 'ee by the throttle and squeeze the life out of 'ee!"

"Take you a-care—I am armed!" Henri replied, thrusting his hand inside of his coat as if to grasp a weapon. He spoke English with a very strong foreign accent.

"Oh, I've heard on ye; ye're the frog-eater that carries a load-sticker, but don't 'ee draw yer steel on me, or I'll show 'ee a Cornish trick and kick it out of yer hand!"

"Don't be in ze hurry—I a favor vill do you!"

"By knocking me into the gutter?"

"Oh, no; I only wanted to see if you was ze true blue."

"You'll find that I am game for anything!" And the sailor shook his head in a dogged way as he spoke.

"It is death if you are not game to ze back-a-bone!"

"I'll risk it, mate."

"There is a few friends of mine who have a-formed a leetle social club, just ze fun and ze mutual improvement, you know, you see, aha! Well, you like to join I take you wid me. It is a vary peculiar club. We do call ourselves ze Skeleton Keys, eh?"

"And I will go bail that you use them once in a while, too, eh, mate?"

"Aha, you are one deuced funny fellow; you vill have ze joke, eh? But to proceed: you come wid me; I introduce you. If you are true blue, all right—you vill make plenty money; if you are a spy of ze police, or betrays us, we vill kill you dead sure as you are born, and bury you so deep in ze earth zat ze rats nevair find you. Vat you say, aha?"

"I'm with you, my hearty! A nice sort of a chap I'd be for a police spy."

The Frenchman shook his head slowly.

"They say"—and he dropped his voice to a whisper, "zat we have ze spies everywhere—zat ze police have put zat cursed Phenix on our track. Perhaps you may be zis Phenix," and he looked searchingly at the sailor, who apparently was so dull that he did not notice the scrutiny.

"Mebbe I am, but I'll risk it if you will. You're just the sort o' chap that I've been looking arter. I want a chance to make a strike, and a big one, and if I ain't true blue knife me on the spot."

"It is good; wait for me at twelve to-night at ze corner above."

So the appointment was made, and that was why the sailor now waited.

CHAPTER V.

A FEMALE BLOODHOUND.

WHEN the grave-digger recovered his senses, he found himself lying exactly in the spot where he had fallen right beside the new made grave, and the first streaks of the dawn's gray light were beginning to line the eastern skies.

The man was stiff and sore in every joint. He rose to a sitting posture and looked around him, completely bewildered.

The birds were singing merrily in the trees; the mists of night were fast vanishing; the grave looked exactly the same as when he had left it, on the previous afternoon, and not a single sign was there to denote that it had been tampered with, in any manner.

Conover was dumfounded; was it all a dream, or was it reality? Had he fallen asleep, and was his encounter with the dark figures, one of whom spoke with the voice of the dead man, only a vision, or were the old stories true which said departed spirits returned and walked the earth, amid the tombs, at the midnight hour? Was it so? Had he essayed to grasp a spirit form? Had Calderwood, dead, returned again to earth, disdaining to rest quiet in his cold, dark grave?

Never in all this world was a man more perplexed. It could not be a dream, but were the dark figures humans on an unlawful quest, or spirits fresh from another world?

"Men or devils, they gave me an awful clip on the head," the old man muttered, raising his hand to his aching brow, which yet throbbed from the force of a blow given with violence enough to have almost felled an ox.

And here another astonishment was in store for the man. His head still ached from the force of the shock, and he expected, judging from the way it felt, that he would find a lump there as big as a hen's egg, but on the contrary, to his intense surprise, there was not the slightest evidence that he had received a blow.

Conover rose slowly to his feet, shaking his head doggedly. He was not a superstitious man, at all, but there seemed to be something entirely out of the common in this affair.

"I wasn't drunk last night, and I wasn't mad, and if I wasn't knocked down, what makes my head ache; and how did I come on the ground, anyway? But if I was knocked down and with a lick hard enough to smash my skull in, how is it that it didn't raise a lump?"

The puzzle was too much for the old man; so he gave it up.

It had been arranged that he was to report immediately to Miss Lodega, at the Hall, if anything happened; and so, after he went home and got his breakfast, he harnessed up his old horse—the grave-digger was also a farmer in a small way—and started for the Highlands.

The old fellow was not particularly well satisfied with himself as he jogged along over the rough and disagreeable road which leads from Hedden's Corner, through Navesink village to the Highlands.

"It is a mighty funny story to tell," he muttered. "If a man was to tell me such a story I should think that he was either drunk or else had fallen asleep and dreamed the hull thing, and, mebbe, that is what she will think, for that gal is no fool, nohow!"

Miss Lodgea was on the watch for the messenger, and she had sighted him a mile off as his wagon crept up the long hill, so she put on her hat and came forth to meet him before he arrived at the mansion.

She was eager to conceal from all the knowledge that she and the grave-digger were in consultation.

Patiently she listened to the strange story which was related with a troubled air, and for a few moments after he had finished she was silent, buried in deep and anxious thought.

Conover had prefaced the tale by saying that he was going to tell the queerest story that ever was told, and that for the life of him he couldn't make head nor tail of it.

"You say that the grave did not appear to have been disturbed?" she said, at last.

"There wasn't a sign of it, miss, this morning."

"But do you think that you would be able to tell if it had been disturbed?"

"Wal, yes, I reckon so," Conover replied, just a little doubtfully. It had suddenly occurred to him that, being a new-made grave, it would not be likely to betray signs of having been tampered with if the men who did the work understood their business and were careful to replace the soil as they had found it.

"It is plain that an attempt to get at the body was made, last night, and I think it likely that you may have frightened them away, although the act of violence which they committed would seem to show that they were desperate and determined men."

"But, what on airth did they hit me with, miss?" Conover blurted out. "There ain't any lump on my head, although I did see more stars than there are in the sky, for jest a second."

"Mr. Conover, the men who are at the root of this strange affair are, I am satisfied, most expert and careful villains. They were prepared for interruption—prepared for everything."

"You think that it was men, then?" Conover asked, with some little hesitation. "You don't think there was anything queer 'bout the thing—any ghosts or sich things?"

The lady shook her head, decidedly.

"I do not believe in ghosts, Mr. Conover, and I do not doubt it was humans who assaulted you."

"But, why didn't the lick raise a lump?"

"Some peculiar weapon was used; these men are no novices."

"But, how 'bout the voice?" persisted Conover, rather reluctant to give up the spirit idea. "I reckon it would have made your hair stand right on end if you had a-heard it; it did mine."

"You are sure that it was the voice of Mr. Calderwood?"

"artin sure, miss!" decidedly. "Why, I have talked with him a hundred times. I never said much to him nor he to me, but I would know his voice, anywhere, even in the darkest night; and I heered him say, jist as plain as could be—'Lick here; my bones are not more than five feet deep!' I tell you what it is, miss, I will own up that I was skeered, and it takes a mighty sight to skeer me, too. I couldn't stay still, for I was too skeered to remain quiet; I had to git up and jump, or I believe I should have died."

"I cannot explain it, at all," Miss Lodgea confessed. In truth, she gave no heed to this part of the story, for she believed it was only a trick of the imagination, and she never for a moment thought that the old grave-digger had heard the voice of the dead man.

"Shall I watch again to-night?"

"No, it will be useless, now; they have either accomplished what they sought, or else have been frightened away; they will be sure to wait for some time before they attempt it again."

She gave Conover five dollars and dismissed him; then, returning to the house, she arrayed herself for walking.

Alli-t-r had not yet returned, so she felt sure that there was no one in the house to watch her. She had resolved upon a bold movement. The attempt upon the grave, whether it had been successful or not, satisfied her that her suspicions were correct, and that there had been foul play, so she resolved to visit the doctor in Red Bank who had attended Mr. Calderwood.

Red Bank on the Navesink, six or seven miles from the Highlands, the well-known summer resort, was the central point for the neighborhood.

As it happened, that day, the steamboat running between Red Bank and New York, touching at the Highlands dock, which makes its trips at irregular hours, according to the tide, was to leave the Highlands about ten o'clock on its way up the river, and return from Red Bank about one.

This would afford her ample time to carry out her purpose.

So the pretty little "Sea-bird," when she touched at the Highlands dock that day, received Miss Lodgea as a passenger.

When she arrived at the town of Red Bank she went at once to the doctor's house. Luck favored the lady, for the doctor was at home.

She introduced herself and told the story to the medical gentleman of her secret marriage, much to his surprise, and then proceeding at

once to the purpose upon which she had come, she asked the astonishing question:

"In your judgment, did Mr. Calderwood die a natural death?"

"Undoubtedly!" the doctor responded, greatly surprised. "Why should you think otherwise?"

She related her suspicions, told of the mysterious will and of the peculiar clause relative to herself, but the doctor was already acquainted with this, as he had been one of the witnesses to the will, and Mr. Calderwood had chosen to make known to him the contents of it. And the doctor gave the same explanation that Allister had vouchsafed.

"You were Southern by birth; he knew that your health would suffer if you remained at the North, and so he was determined to do all in his power to force you to remain in the South."

"But, doctor, I know that there has been foul play," and then she related how she had placed a watch in the cemetery, and also narrated Conover's strange tale. The doctor laughed; he evidently put no faith at all in the adventure.

"Can we not have the body taken up and a careful examination made?" she asked. "Is there no drug that might have been administered to Mr. Calderwood?"

Now this was touching the doctor in a tender point, and he replied at once, and a little sharply:

"Mr. Calderwood died a natural death, as far as human judgment can decide; I do not express my own opinion alone, but that of three other gentlemen, all as good doctors as you can find anywhere, and one of them, my friend from Shrewsbury, stands as high as any physician in the country. Under the circumstances the idea of foul play is ridiculous, and to ex-hume the body would be, in my opinion, a gross outrage upon decency. I speak plainly, madam, for I perceive that you have allowed yourself to become the victim of a most absurd hallucination."

"I am mad, I suppose," the lady remarked, rising; "but, like all mad people, I believe that I am right, and I shall, until I receive actual proof to the contrary. Can you direct me to a good lawyer?"

The doctor did so, and then bowed the lady out, extremely glad to get rid of such a visionary.

CHAPTER VI.

STRANGE PROCEEDINGS.

THE sailor was lounging carelessly on the corner, keeping a close watch up and down the street, though, for the Frenchman, but, as the latter did not make his appearance quite as quickly as the sailor thought he ought to, he began to get impatient.

"Curse the frog eater!" he muttered, "ain't he a-going to keep his word with me? and it's my last chance, too. If this here thing don't turn up trumps, blessed if I won't have to go upon one of the avenues and collar the first well-dressed chap I see! I wonder what the time is, anyway? It must be arter twelve, and at twelve he said that he would be here. The first man that comes along I'll ask what the time is. Mebbe I am ahead instead of his being behind."

There was plenty of life in the street, for the Rue de Baxter is almost as lively at twelve o' the night as at high noon. A great portion of the inhabitants being birds and beasts of prey, like their savage prototypes they roam by night and sleep by day.

The first man that came along was a short, thick-set fellow dressed poorly, like a mechanic in his working clothes, but from the peculiar way he was slouching along, peering all around him into every dark corner, and from the manner in which he wore his hat, a soft felt, pulled down over his eyes so as to shade his face, one well acquainted with the dangerous classes of New York, would have been apt at the first glance to have set him down for anything but an honest respectable member of society.

As he came past the sailor he favored him with a searching glance and the latter accosted him:

"I say, mate, have you gotten the time o' day along with you?"

"A tucker, eh?" observed the other, halting and taking a good look at the stalwart proportions of the other.

"That is what I said; didn't I speak plain enough?" and he scowled at the man as he put the question.

"Oh, yes, plain as a broom-handle," and he moved off a step or two, as if a little alarmed.

"Well, can't you answer a civil question, and be hanged to you?"

"What do you want to know for?" and the man retreated two steps more.

"I want to know what the time is, you big idiot!" cried the sailor, in a rage. "What is it to you what I want to know for?"

"Oh, you want me to take out my tucker and let you see it, so that you kin tell the time?" the other remarked, in a very suggestive sort of way.

"Yes, of course."

"I see! I'm up to your little game! I take

out the tucker, you grabs it, hits me a welt in the head, and then it's good-by watch! Oh, no! not for Joel!"

The sailor with an exclamation of rage advanced toward the fellow, but he at once took to his heels and ran down the street like a grayhound.

"I ought to give him a clip just for luck," the sailor muttered, as he resumed his former position without attempting to pursue the other.

The next man who came along was a tall, slender fellow, who at a distance appeared to be exceedingly well-dressed in a dark suit, but, when he came nearer, it could be seen that the suit was threadbare, barely hanging together, and that the fellow was "seedy" in the extreme.

He came on, though, with a jaunty, devil-may-care air, and an experienced eye would have pronounced him to be either a genteel pickpocket or a confidence man out of luck.

The sailor accosted him, also, but this one did not betray the least sign of alarm, although he eyed the other very sharply at first. These children of the night, social outcasts, crime-stained souls, the pariahs of society,

"See in each bush an officer."

"A watch, eh?" the stranger said; "oh, yes, I have one, a regular stunner, too; none of your common cheap trash, but an out-and-out, sixteen jewels, case eighteen carats, and two turnips and a clean 'beat' all through!" and then the man cocked the much-the-worse-for-wear Derby hat which he wore still more rakishly over one eye and winked significantly at the sailor. "But, I say, my friend and backer, what do you want to know for? Do you think of investing in a turnip? I reckon, though, from your looks that if watches were selling for two cents apiece you wouldn't be able to buy enough to open a jewelry store."

"I only want to know what time it has got to be!" growled the sailor, who didn't relish the flippant manner of the other at all.

"No idea of raising the wind by making a grab for it after I get it out, eh?"

"What do you take me for?" demanded the sailor, angrily.

"I take you for a man about the same kidney as I am—ready to do almost anything for money," the other answered, coolly. "You're broke, ain't you?"

"What if I am? It isn't any of your business, is it?"

"What lay are you on?"

"None at all."

"Well, if you are broke, and you ain't on any lay, what in blazes difference does it make to you what the time is?"

"I'm waiting for a friend who was to meet me here at twelve."

"Oh, well; I can ease your mind then; it is after twelve; you see I don't carry my watch now, for fear of hurting it. An uncle up in Chatham street takes care of one for me—my esteemed friend, Simpson, three balls, you know. Two to one you don't take out what you put in; ta, ta!"

And then the easy-talking, agreeable gentleman went on his way.

"Dash the parley-vo!" the sailor exclaimed, in disgust, "I might have known that he wouldn't come to time. There ain't anything but trickery about these frog-eaters, anyway."

"Sang Dieu! you are very mooch pleased to make ze compliment to me!" said a voice, right in the ear of the sailor. It was the voice of the Frenchman; and, turning in no little astonishment, the Cornishman beheld the grinning face of Red Henri, standing right at his elbow, but how he had managed to get there was a mystery to the sailor, for he had kept his eyes well about him.

"Hallo! where in blazes did you come from?"

"Mebbe I do drop from ze sky, or rise like ze spectair at de opéra from ze ground; I have a-kept my eye on you for some time, Mistair Robair Cragan. You tink to pull ze wool over my eyes, eh? You must rise up vary early in ze morning; it is bettair zat you no go to bed at all."

"What do you mean?"

"Why you talk wiz those two detectives—the best on ze force? I know dem, though they are got up nice. Zat first man was John Petairs; ze second, my friend Irving. I love zat man mooch—vary mooch; I will stick a knife in him some nice day—you hear me, eh?" and the Frenchman ground his teeth together with a fierce "sacré!"

"I didn't know that they were detectives," the sailor replied, in a sulky tone. "I wanted to know what the time was and so I asked the first man that came along."

"Zat is vat I call vary suspicious," the other cried, sharply. "You ask ze time of day, does not zat mean, 'I am all right—I am on ze track—keep your eyes on me, queeck, eh?'"

"Oh, to blazes with you and your gang. You had better not take me if you are afeard. I guess I can make a strike for myself somewhere. I've got my tools with me, and I won't starve."

"Tools! vat tools, eh?"

"None of your business!" the other retorted, roughly. "And now, what is it to be? Do you want me for a pal, or not?"

"We need a compatriot like you vary mooch—a man wiz ze strength of ze lion and ze heart of ze bull-dog. Zat pal we vill make mooch rich, but we fear—"

"Fear what?"

"Zat devil zat they call Joe Phenix. If he is on our track, we know it is either we kill him or he jug us. If you are Phenix, or his spy, you go wiz me we kill you dead, sure!"

"You're a kind of chicken-hearted set, anyway, I guess!" the sailor sneered. "If I am willing to risk I don't see where you have any call to be skeered."

"Come then; it is your life you trust wiz me!"

"It ain't worth much to me or anybody else."

"Come!"

The Frenchman opened the door right behind where the two were standing; the building to which the door belonged was unoccupied.

The sailor understood the trick now. The Frenchman had been on the watch behind the door, so that if he had been a police spy and had attempted to communicate with the officers while in waiting, the attempt would be immediately detected.

Inside was utter darkness. The Frenchman closed the door and locked it. Then, taking the sailor by the hand he said:

"Follow me; we have a long journey to make."

Then he conducted the other in a series of eccentric circles all around the room, evidently with the idea of bewildering him so that he would not be able to tell by which door he quit the apartment, and so well was this managed that the sailor was not conscious when they had passed from one room into another. Then through a secret passage, deep down into the earth, they went—very deep, for the sailor counted every step, and as carefully as the Frenchman tried to bewilder him, just as earnestly he endeavored to remember all the details of the mysterious journey.

The stairs at an end, the twain passed along a narrow underground passage. The denseness of the air told the sailor that he was beneath the surface of the earth, and as his elbows touched the soft earth on either side of him every now and then, he knew that the passage must be extremely narrow.

At last the guide stopped, and the sailor by means of his hands could feel that the way was barred by a solid wall of earth.

"Seek till you feel a two handles like ze door-knobs," Red Henri said.

"I've got them!"

"Grasp them; press yourself tight against ze wall and your feet firm on ze ground, and hold ze knobs like grim death!"

A bell sounded.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ORDEAL.

THE sailor did exactly as he was bid, grasped hold of the knobs and pressed himself tight against the wall.

Then there came a peculiar motion; the walls moved, whirled to the right about, in obedience evidently to the signal given by the bell, and the sailor understood that he had been transported into another apartment; the wall worked after the fashion of a turn-table, but all was still as dark as the Egyptian gloom famed in story.

"Turn you around—place your back to ze wall, then wait," commanded the Frenchman.

The other did so at once. He felt rather than heard the Frenchman glide away.

For five minutes at least the sailor waited motionless as a statue; five minutes we say, but it seemed four times that length of time to the waiting man.

Then, all of a sudden, a low, distinct voice spoke the old Biblical words that at creation's dawn decreed the birth of the world:

"Let there be light!"

At once, as if by magic, darkness vanished, and the stranger had a chance to use his eyes.

He was standing in a circular apartment, hollowed out of the very earth itself, and evidently far down below the level of the street, for no sound of tread of feet or roll of wheels could be heard.

The sailor understood the cunning device. If an outsider succeeded in gaining, by any chance, admission to the vault, by means of the turn-about doors, if he was not particular to mark the exact spot through which he came, he would never be able to discover it again, the door once closed; for so cunningly was the vault contrived that the wall which inclosed it seemed a solid one.

In the center of the vault fixed to the roof a human skull was attached, and from the horrible apertures in it streamed the gaslight which illuminated the apartment. The rascals had evidently tapped the gas-pipes in the ground above.

There were seven tall figures in the room and so strangely disguised that they appeared utterly unlike humans. They were all attired exact-

ly alike so that one could not be told from the other; a huge black cloak pendent from the head covered one and all—just a black cloak and nothing more, so that in shape they all appeared like long black pyramids, or, if by an effort of fancy, one could convert the figures into humans, then men of gigantic stature without heads.

But, that they all possessed this necessary appendage was clearly proven by the fact that a pair of gleaming eyes flashed through slits in each black cloak, and there was also a similar slit for the action of the mouth.

Six or eight stools, also draped in black, comprised the furniture of the vault.

The disguised men were evenly ranged, three on each side of the center one, who evidently was the chief of the band.

The quick eyes of the sailor took in every detail of the scene almost in an instant.

"Who is this man?" asked the chief, in a voice strongly Irish in its accent.

But the sailor was not deceived; he understood that the chief of this secret league was speaking in a feigned voice and that he had assumed the Irish brogue so as to disguise his real tones.

"Please your honor, I want a job," the sailor replied, perceiving that the question was addressed to him.

"What kind of a job?"

"Anything; it don't matter much."

"Can you be depended upon?"

"To the death; I never went back on a pal in my life."

"Do you know where you stand now?"

"About as near to eternal blazes as I reckon that I will ever get in this world," the sailor answered, jocularly.

"You believe in eternal fires, then?"

"Oh, I reckon some of us will roast some of these days if we ain't keeful what we are about when it comes our turn to take our trick at the wheel."

"You know that you are in the secret haunt of a band of desperate men?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"And if we thought that you were a spy of the police we would cut your throat as quickly and with no more concern than if you were a rabbit."

"Oh, you can't skeer me with talk!" the sailor answered, defiantly. "I am true blue all the way through, no matter how you take me."

"This little social club is known as the League of the Skeleton Keys."

"That ain't bad!" the other remarked, approvingly.

"And though we stick to a brother through thick and thin as tight as the shirt to his back, we kill a spy or a traitor without mercy."

"That's hearty, mates!"

"We want you to go into this thing with your eyes open—we want you to know what you are about. If you join us you must swear to pay implicit obedience to any order that you receive from the chief of the club."

"Ay, ay, obey orders though you break owners! That's the old sailor motto: I understand that, and I'm the man that will live up to it."

"Suppose you are commanded to put a knife into a man?"

"Well, mates, I ain't much on the brag, but this I can say, the sight of a knife never skeered me yet, whether I was to feel it or use it, but, of course, you won't ask a man to run his neck into a rope without there is some chance for him to get it out ag'in."

"Oh, no, we protect our instruments."

"I'm your man, then, for any such job; show me the man and I'll show you that it takes a sailor to do a handy trick with the knife."

"Oh, you are a very smart fellow; we have no doubt in regard to that." The sentence was very quietly spoken, but the quick ears of the sailor detected that there was a latent menace in it, and he was on his guard in an instant.

"Well, mates, I don't brag on my smartness. I know enough to get along and to do what I'm told."

"You are modest—extremely modest—too modest, in fact; you do not do yourself justice," the chief of the disguised men remarked, in an extremely sarcastic tone. "You are smart—very shrewd, and with a head on your shoulders that few men in this world can boast of, but, as often happens in this life of ours, for once you have been outwitted."

The sailor stared blankly; the expression of amazement was extremely natural, if it was feigned.

"Yes, sir, for once in your life you have undertaken a job too big for you—to use your very apt American saying, you have bit off more than you can chew."

"I don't know what the job is, yet, but if it is too big for me, I s'pose I'd better not tackle it."

"That is exactly what you ought to have said to Superintendent Walling, when he suggested the thing to you."

Again the sailor stared.

"You are doing it very finely; you are a credit to the business," the masked chief continued, with an approving nod. "But, in this case

we are too much for you. You have had a great deal of success since you entered into your present mode of life, but, in this instance, we knew exactly what your game was before you began to play your hand, so, of course, you stood no chance at all. To be honest with you, you are about the only man in the country that we fear at all, and so we made up our minds that if you did get on our track we would do our level best to silence you right at the beginning. We were in hopes that you would be wise enough to let us alone. There is no money in breaking us up, so to speak; you could make a deal more by attending to your own private affairs; but we were afraid that you might be tempted to try the task of hunting us down, and so the instant we got an inkling of what was in the wind, we put a watch on you, and since the day when you had the talk with the police superintendent about us, our spies have been constantly at your heels. We gave you a fair chance to back out of this affair a dozen times. You have been warned, over and over again, that if you were a police spy you were walking to your death when you followed our messenger. You were rashly confident in your own courage and skill, and now you are safe in the trap. You will never leave this place alive, unless you are willing and able to suggest some means by which we will be sure that you will never trouble us again. Don't flatter yourself that we have not penetrated your disguise, for we have. We know that you are Joe Phenix. We know that you arranged with the two detectives, Peters and Irving, to track you to-night. You spoke to both of them, and gave them the signal that all was progressing favorably, and that you had struck the trail; one went up the street, the other down, so that one could follow you, no matter which way you went, but we were up to that game; you have disappeared, and they have no clew. This place is your tomb, Joe Phenix, unless you can satisfy us in some way. You shall have all the time you want to consider the matter, for we intend to simply leave you here to die of starvation. If you conclude to 'squeal,' when you are ready to make terms, call out and you will be heard. And now, farewell!"

And with the word came utter darkness.

The police spy was alone, entombed alive!

The sailor was the well-known detective officer; he had undertaken the task that had baffled all the detective officers of the great city. He had undertaken to ferret out and bring to justice the secret League of the Skeleton Keys, and, lo! at the very first attempt he had fallen into the snare of the rascals. What chance of escape was there for him from this living tomb?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SALAMANDERS.

ON upper Fifth avenue, near Central Park, where the *crème de la crème* of New York society have their local habitations, on a very prominent corner is a stately brown-stone mansion. The house, with the stables and gardens, occupied four full lots of ground, and when we state that a lot in this vicinity is worth fifty to one hundred thousand dollars, the value of the palace, for it was a palace indeed in every sense of the word, may partially be estimated.

This brown-stone abode was one of the spots of interest at which every stranger in great Gotham, "doing the city," was supposed to gape with intense interest.

Not to have seen Mike Salamander's palatial abode, (palatial we believe is the usual appellation applied to this sort of thing) was to have missed one of the sights of the city.

And, who was the man bearing the plebeian cognomen of "Mike" yet the master of a palace fit for an emperor?

Few men were there in the city, or in the country at large for that matter, who could not instantly have answered the question.

For over forty years Mike Salamander had been prominently before the public eye.

He had commenced as a steamboat hand, then had pushed his way up until he got a boat of his own; the one boat soon grew into a fleet; Captain Mike became a power in the land; he went into politics; a rough, brawny, unscrupulous individual, with no particular brains to speak of, yet gifted with a great amount of low cunning, backed by a bull-doglike obstinacy, bold, bluff Captain Mike was just the man to wade into the mire of politics, and pluck, not exactly fame, but wealth and power out of the troubled waters.

The captain during the early part of his life, even after he had acquired wealth, was a very plain liver—in fact a good deal of a miser in a great many respects, but after the flush times of the war were over, and he found himself possessed of a fortune estimated to exceed six or eight millions, he thought it about time to launch out and astonish his associates, and so the brown-stone mansion was constructed, and Captain Mike set out to live like a prince for the rest of his days, entirely giving up politics.

"Too much trouble," he said; "and besides, a man has to associate with such a cursed set of low fellows; it quite disgusts a gentleman."

A very proper sentiment to come from the lips of one who had spent all his young days in the society of the rough and tough rivermen, and whose father, though an honest man was of extremely low degree.

In his old age the captain aped the aristocrat, and was very fond of talking about his servants, "my men," and if he could have had his way, would have put every man-Jack on his boat into a livery with a big M. S. blazoned on every button.

In fine, to sum the captain up in a few words, he was one of those who worshiped money, tried to appear to be a gentleman born and bred, and had an idea that gold could buy anything in this world. Mankind too, at large, dazzled by his millions—by the immense power which he wielded like a despot—called him a fine, bluff, hearty old gentleman; whereas, if he had been a poor man, and had indulged in any such nonsense as he usually gave vent to, on the slightest provocation, the world most undoubtedly would have said that he was a coarse, vulgar, ill-mannered old curmudgeon.

Money does make a great difference, sometimes!

The man had been wonderfully successful—wonderfully lucky, and it had so happened in his career through life that he had never really met his match but once, and that was when he married, some twenty years before the time of which we write, just as he was commencing to accumulate his immense fortune. And of all women in this world he chose a stately girl, proud as a princess, and of good family and fortune. Why she ever married this ill-bred upstart was a mystery to all her friends, but, it is possible that she was gifted with uncommon fore-sight, and guessed that the brawny, rough-spoken cub, possessed to a great degree the eminently American art of making money.

She wedded him, and ruled him, rough as he was, with a rod of steel, and iron-will Mike never rebelled, either; he had got the idea in his head that his wife was a sort of a superior being, and that she had brought great good luck to him.

A single child came of the union—a daughter who inherited all the mother's pride and coldness; in fact there was hardly a trace of the bluff old captain in her.

When Mike got into politics he went off to Washington, and in the exuberance of his coarse animal spirits he got into several disgraceful scrapes, which, by liberal expenditure of money, he succeeded in keeping from public knowledge, but not from his wife. The Honorable Mike Salamander had plenty of enemies, and some of them contrived to carry the news to Mrs. Salamander, expecting of course that there would be a glorious family disturbance.

But the lady had too much pride to cause scandal; and besides, she was an utterly cold-blooded animal and didn't care two straws for her husband. But she made him pay for his misdeeds, though. He was obliged to settle about a million of dollars on the daughter, absolutely at her disposal, and then she said, quietly: "Now then, she is independent of you if I should die."

It seemed as if the lady had a presentiment that she was not long for this world; indeed, in about a year after this event happened, she bid the world good-night.

And now, at the time of which we write, the captain was a hale and hearty man of sixty, and the daughter—Hero she was named—was a blooming beauty just turned twenty one.

In many respects Hero Salamander was a most remarkable girl. She was a beauty, and yet of an extremely odd type. Not one girl in ten thousand would resemble her.

She was tall and stately in figure, extremely perfect in form, and with a face of rare loveliness.

A strange face, too—a complexion very pale, the flush on the cheek very pink, her luxuriant hair red-gold in color—in truth more red than gold, and her eyes a deep, dark, exquisite blue.

A face once seen never to be forgotten.

Just about the hour that Miss Lodega arrived at Calderwood Hall and made the strange announcement that she was the wife of the dead man, Salamander father and Salamander daughter sat in their magnificent parlor, talking of the master of Calderwood Hall.

"Deuced nice fellow!" the old captain exclaimed. "Had a good deal of 'sand' in him, too! I know that he got stuck last week, in Wall street, for a cool fifty thousand, but he never even squealed. No kicking about him!"

"Father, why don't you leave off those horrid expressions?" the daughter asked, a faint look of disgust appearing upon her beautiful face.

"Well, I've got to speak good United States language, haven't I?" he retorted. "But it's true; he did have 'sand' and he didn't squeal—took his gruel like a man; came to time regular. He must have had a pile of money to stand it."

"Mr. Calderwood undoubtedly was rich."

"And you kinder had your eyes on him, eh? Oh, I saw how the cat jumped, blamed if I didn't! But I wasn't going to say a word; I was going to let you go your own gait; you're

independent, anyway; but I say, Billy, you would have had him in time, wouldn't you?"

The old captain never called the girl by her right name; it was a heathen, new-fangled thing, good enough for a steamboat or a fire-engine, but not for a child. The mother had had her way, as she always did, but the father from babyhood never called the girl anything but Billy.

"I don't really know, father. I liked him, and yet I didn't like him. When he was with me, in a measure he fascinated me," she confessed. "I know the idea is a ridiculous one, but it is the truth. When he was away from me I never seemed to care much for him."

"He was a deuced nice fellow, and, as you say, he did have a taking way with him. I liked the cuss first-rate, and if I had known that he was on the bull side in this last flurry I would have helped him out, for it was me and my gang that smashed the market and knocked things sky-high. I cleared a hundred thousand on the operation. But I say, Billy, this Englishman had a brother; Calderwood was telling me about him only the other day, and he said that he was a ripper; maybe he'll come after you?"

"I'm not in any hurry to get married," and the girl curled her ripe red lips in disdain.

"No, you are mighty hard to suit; you have had a dozen offers already, and nary one of them suited you."

"I think my money attracted the most of them."

"It would be strange if it didn't; but I say, Billy, how about this vagabond artist that stuck your head up in the Academy?"

"Oh, I have found out all about him; his name is Orbison—Valentine Orbison; they say that he is a very clever artist, although not much patronized. He saw me driving on the avenue one day and my face took his fancy, so he transferred it to canvas in a fancy picture, without the slightest idea of who I was," the girl answered, languidly.

"Cursed romantic, isn't it? But I say, Billy, ain't it a trick to get you interested in the fellow?" The old man was always suspicious.

"Oh, no; it was just an accident, but I'm going to make the fellow's fortune—I'm going to let him paint my portrait, and that will bring him orders enough."

"Going to amuse yourself with him, eh? Well, look out that you don't get caught yourself, some day."

The girl laughed; little danger was there for her, she thought, so long as the face of the dead Ethelwold Calderwood haunted her as it did, by day and by night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOCKSMITH.

ON Third avenue, a few streets above the Cooper Institute, in front of a small two-storied frame house, swung a large golden key, and on the sign-board over the door of the diminutive store which occupied the lower part of the house, appeared the advertisement of Simon Wayland, locksmith and bell-hanger.

Wayland, the locksmith, was one of the oldest inhabitants of the district.

His modest two-story house had originally been a country cottage with a garden surrounding it, then the locksmith had a store in the lower part of the town, but with the rush of trade northward had come Wayland; his sign was one of the first to appear on the avenue.

The locksmith was a man well advanced in years, a jovial, hearty old fellow, who was apparently good for some time yet.

The locksmith was very much respected among his neighbors, and as he had been a diligent worker with a good trade for quite a long time, it was generally believed that he had "feathered his nest" pretty well.

A single child only had the old man, a beautiful, blooming girl who bore the rather odd name of Eldorado—a whim of the mother who had thought it very appropriate for the little golden-haired baby when it first made its appearance in this world of care. That mother had long since departed this life, but the girl had remained always under the fostering care of her good father.

Wayland's household consisted of himself, his daughter, a maid-servant and a young man named Paul Delamater, an orphan boy, who had grown up in the old locksmith's service.

"The best apprentice that ever handled a tool in my shop," Wayland was wont to declare, and the old man was quite delighted when the boy announced, at the end of his apprenticeship, that, if his master was agreeable, he would much prefer to remain in the old shop, rather than go out into the world to seek his fortune.

Eldorado and Paul had of course been boy and girl together; and some of the gossiping neighbors, busybodies, who, not having enough of their own affairs to occupy all their time, amused themselves by attending to their neighbors' concerns, took it upon themselves to ask the old gentleman if he was not afraid that a love affair might grow up between the two.

But the locksmith laughed at the idea, and in his good-natured way, thanked the speakers for their kindness, and at the same time gave them to understand that he thought he would be able

to manage his family affairs without any outside help; but these busybodies came to the conclusion that the old man would not be offended if the two did make a match; at which they greatly wondered, for Delamater of course was poor, while it was shrewdly suspected that Eldorado would be quite an heiress, one of these days.

In person Delamater was a tall, well built fellow, with crispy, curling locks, clear hazel eyes, and a pleasant, open face, which was a passport to immediate favor with strangers.

The locksmith sat in the little room at the back of the store, examining a small key of peculiar shape, which evidently had just received the finishing touches.

Eldorado was seated by the window busily engaged in sewing. Happening to raise her eyes, she noticed the key in her father's hands.

"What a peculiar little key, father," she remarked.

"Yes, it is an odd affair; the lock, I dare say, that this key fits, was never made in this country nor in England, either. I guess that it is of French workmanship. But, the oddest thing about the key is that the man who ordered it will never receive it."

"And why not?" asked the girl, surprised at the remark.

"Because he is dead, Dory dear"—the locksmith's pet name for his child.

And the girl understood at once to whom he referred.

"It was ordered by Mr. Calderwood?"

"Yes, only a week or so ago. Poor gentleman! he little thought then that he would so soon be so situated that key and locks and such things wouldn't be of no interest to him."

The girl bent over her work and did not reply, but there was a troubled expression upon her face.

"As nice a gentleman as ever came into my shop, too!" the old man continued. "But I had no idea that he was rich, or anything of that sort. I knew that he did business in Wall street, but I always thought that he was a clerk in some of them big banking-houses, or in a broker's place, maybe. I had no idea that he was an independent gentleman, such as the newspapers say. I never saw him have much money; never a roll of bills or a check, or anything of that sort. He was a great fellow for mechanics; took a wonderful interest in such things, and was always getting all sorts of queer little tools made. I had an idea that he was a kind of inventor, or something of that sort, although he was very close-mouthed about his affairs. I never said much, because he was a good customer, and a nice fellow besides, and I did not want him to think that I was prying into his affairs, but I thought that I knew what he was after. I have met two or three such chaps in my lifetime; all good fellows and nice men, but a little cracked on inventing; had an idea, you know, that they were on the track of something, like the sewing machine or the cotton gin—some wonderful concern that would make their eternal fortune. Well, when Mr. Calderwood got me to make all these queer little gimcracks, without going into any particular explanation of why he wanted them, or what he wanted them for, of course I jumped at once to the conclusion that he was an inventor, and was afraid to say much for fear that some one would find out what he was after and get in ahead of him."

"But, according to the newspaper accounts he was very rich and had no need to trouble himself with anything of that kind," the girl observed.

"Yes, I see now that it was only a whim of his. Instead of being a poor man, struggling to invent something by means of which he could accumulate a fortune, he was rich and was only dabbling in mechanics for the fun of the thing, but this I will say, he was a genius in that way, rich or poor. He was a natural born engineer, and no bad locksmith either; he could handle a tool about as well as I could myself. I took a great interest in the man and we got quite intimate considering our short acquaintance, and since I've read in the newspapers about that splendid place of his down at the Highlands I've made up my mind to treat myself to an excursion and go down and see it. I've got a good excuse, you know—this here key. It is quite important, I know, and Mr. Calderwood set quite a store on it, for he told me that it belonged to an old box that he got across the water, and, from what he kinder hinted, I imagine he kept his valuable papers in it. Anyhow, he had lost the key and he wanted me to make one. I remember just as well as can be how I told him to bring the box and then I would fit a key to it; but he said that he couldn't do that very well, as it was down in the country, and he hated to take the trouble to bring it up, so I got some wax and showed him how to take the impression of the lock. I remember how he laughed at the idea and said that now, thanks to my instructions, he would be able to set up for a first-class burglar, and asked me which was the richest and best bank for him to commence operations on."

"But, father, how strange it is when you have such a good opinion of the gentleman that

Paul has such a bad one?" the girl asked, somewhat hesitatingly.

Wayland chuckled quietly for a moment before he replied:

"Well, well, Dory, it isn't at all strange to me," he answered. "Paul maybe got the idea into his head that Mr. Calderwood was paying a little too much attention to you."

A vivid blush swept rapidly over the face of the maiden, and more intently than ever she fixed her eyes upon her work.

"Paul, you know, kinder looks upon you as being a little more than a sister to him, and I saw quite a time ago that he didn't like Mr. Calderwood's attentions to you."

"I am sure, father, the gentleman never paid me any particular attention."

"Maybe not; I don't say that he did; but Paul thought so, and the lad took it so badly that he plucked up courage to speak to me about it."

"He had very little to do so, father Wayland!" the girl exclaimed, a little indignant at the idea.

"He thinks a great deal of you, Dory, and you ought not to blame him. Paul is a good boy, too, and an excellent workman; no better in the trade that I know of; he is quite a genius, too—quite a turn for inventing. I shouldn't be surprised if he struck out something new yet that will make his fortune."

"But he really had no business to interfere in my affairs, and I do not like it, at all."

"Well, well; it is all one now; the man is dead and gone, and there is an end of it. I will tell you frankly, Dory, that I kinder had an idea Mr. Calderwood had taken a fancy to you, but I didn't say anything, for I didn't think the time had arrived for me to act."

"He was always very polite, but that was all," the girl answered, but in her heart of hearts she knew that she was concealing the truth. Calderwood's attentions to her had been more than mere politeness called for; but, as her father had said, it was all over now, and if in the warmth and light of her girlish fancy she had allowed herself to yield to wild and vague dreams, why, it was her secret and no one had a right to share it with her.

"I'll go down to the Highlands to-morrow, for I want to see the place; I have a curiosity to see if it comes up to the newspaper descriptions. This key is, no doubt, important, and it will be a good excuse," the old gentleman assumed.

Little idea had he when he formed this plan that he was taking measures to mix himself up in the dark mystery that surrounded the death of the owner of Calderwood Hall, and that he was about to still further entangle the threads that, with great patience, a woman's wit was striving to disengage.

CHAPTER X.

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

"CRAZY, am I?" Miss Lodega muttered, in a rage, as she walked along the street on her way to the lawyer's office. "Perhaps I am, but before I get through with this mysterious affair, I think all who are concerned in it will have to acknowledge that there is a great deal of method in my madness."

It was some little distance from the doctor's house to the office of the legal gentleman, and as she traversed the space her mind was actively engaged in reviewing the situation of affairs.

"Is the doctor in league with the men who have put Calderwood to death, or is he innocently a victim to this great deception?" she asked, communing with herself after the fashion of busy minds. "No, it is not possible that he knows anything about it. His character stands too high; he would not lend himself to a deception of this kind. He has been tricked; able as he thinks himself, he has been tricked by these villains who are far more than a match for him. Men are blind sometimes; on the surface there was no reason for suspicion, and nothing occurred to hint at foul play. But Allister knows of it. Allister is the chief tool of the men who stand in the background—of the men who are to profit by Calderwood's death. But who those men are—what they are, and where they are, I cannot even guess; nor the motive for the crime, for of course there was a motive, and a powerful one, else it would never have been committed. Calderwood, too, had a fear of his doom. I did not understand, at the time, why he took leave of me with such lingering tenderness; but there was a weight on his mind; the shadow of his impending doom hung over him. Oh, why did he not keep me with him? My keen watchfulness would have frustrated the schemes of these plotters who have worked so cunningly in the dark. But who are they—where are they? How can I strike at them when I am really ignorant that they exist, and have only my suspicions to go upon?"

And then to the mind of the woman flashed the remembrance of the two women—the women who wore veils so thick that their faces were totally disguised—who attended the funeral of Calderwood.

"As sure as I am a living, breathing creature these two women had something to do with this

dreadful mystery. They were strangers, probably from the city. I must find out who they are. Through them, perhaps, I may get a clue. First, I will consult the lawyer and lay the whole case before him; perhaps he may be able to advise me how I had better proceed."

By this time she had reached the door of the lawyer's office.

A tin sign affixed to the side of the door read:

"ALEXANDER SCHRODERHOFF,
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR AT LAW."

"Alexander," she muttered; "it is the name of a conqueror, but will he be able to cope with this mystery?"

She had not the faintest idea what kind of a man this lawyer was; all she knew of him was what she had learned from the doctor's recommendation.

"A very able man, indeed!" he had declared; "sharp as a steel-trap and just the sort of fellow to undertake a difficult case."

The legal gentleman had his quarters on the second floor, and the lady proceeding up-stairs, knocked at the door, and the master of the apartment speedily made his appearance.

He was a gentleman about the medium height, with keen gray eyes, an extremely prominent nose—altogether, to sum the face up in a sentence, he put one very much in mind of a hawk or some similar bird of prey.

Now, Miss Lodega was no poor judge of faces, and the Jersey lawyer impressed her at once.

Mentally she said to herself, reading his character at a glance, "This is a smart, shrewd fellow, with plenty of go-ahead and courage, and one that would not hesitate nor be particular in regard to the means used, so long as success was attained in the end."

And the lawyer, also an excellent judge of character, perceived that he had to deal with no ordinary woman, for Miss Lodega had that presence and demeanor which infallibly indicate will-power.

The lady proceeded at once to business; she explained the object of her call; the lawyer hastened to bring her a chair. With careful distinctness in statement she proceeded to relate all the particulars of the strange mystery which to her mind surrounded the death of Ethelwold Calderwood, and of her relations with him.

The lawyer listened with rapt attention; he always allowed his clients to tell their stories without any interruption, only occasionally jotting down a note now and then with his pencil upon a loose sheet of paper.

The story was indeed a most strange one, and the lawyer was perplexed.

"You were married to Mr. Calderwood after you had been acquainted with him—had been in his employ in fact—about a week?"

"Yes."

"You were married in New York?"

"Yes."

"At the minister's house?"

"Yes."

"A secret marriage without witnesses?"

"Four servants."

"Inmates of the minister's house?"

"Yes."

"You have your marriage certificate?"

"Oh, yes; you may rest assured of that. I am no child, and even if Mr. Calderwood had attempted to trifle with me I should speedily have convinced him that he had selected the wrong person." And Miss Lodega's eyes snapped as she spoke. It was quite evident to the lawyer that she was not the kind of woman likely to be deceived or tricked by any man.

"Then in your mind there is not the slightest doubt that your marriage can be proven, and that it will be impossible for any one to thrust it aside, although, in this will that you speak of, you are not mentioned as his wife?"

"There is no doubt whatever but what I can prove my marriage," Miss Lodega answered, firmly. "In the first place I have the certificate; in the second place I can go at once to the house of the minister and call upon him and his two servants to testify."

"Mr. Calderwood did not attempt, then, in any way to conceal who or what he was?"

"Oh, no! On the contrary, he described his country seat at the Highlands to him, and invited him to call at his earliest opportunity."

The lawyer was slowly gathering up the threads in his own mind.

"Then you had business that called you South; you went away—"

"And was compelled to wait a week in New York, and then, just as I was about to start on my journey, the news of Mr. Calderwood's death reached me."

"By letter?"

"Oh, no, through the newspapers; no one, not even Mr. Calderwood himself, had my address in New York; I did not expect to remain there, and I was to write to my husband when I arrived at my destination in the South. There is where the plot comes in; the men who contrived the death of my husband so arranged it that it should happen during my absence; they expected that the funeral would be over long before the news of the death could reach me."

"You think then that the parties concerned in this affair knew of your secret marriage?"

"I am sure of it!" the lady replied, decidedly. "And I am afraid that that is the reason why the deed was done. Unhappy woman that I am! I helped to hurry my poor husband forward to his dreadful doom."

Pathetic as was the speech yet not a single tear appeared in her eyes. She seemed like a woman of iron—insensible to all common emotion.

"And you have no idea at all why any one should desire Mr. Calderwood's death?"

"None."

"Does there appear to be any one who will profit by it?"

"No; if Mr. Allister is to be believed Mr. Calderwood was almost a bankrupt at the time of his death. His brother, who was in England, myself, and Mr. Allister, are all who will derive any benefit from the death of Mr. Calderwood."

"And about this grave affair—you feel sure that there was some mischief in the cemetery and that Conover's story can be relied upon?"

"I believe that he spoke the truth."

The lawyer was groping in the dark; despite his shrewdness he had not hit upon anything tangible yet.

"Suppose you let me look at the marriage certificate if you have it with you?" he asked, suddenly, an idea having come into his mind.

She produced it. It was a printed blank form to be filled in with ink.

But it was still blank!

Not a scratch of a pen appeared upon the surface!

The woman gazed in horror at the fearful sight.

CHAPTER XI.

A BAFFLED WOMAN.

THE face of a statue could not be more rigid than the face of the lady as she looked with straining eyes at the unexpected sight.

The certificate was as blank as when it had come from the printing press.

The lawyer was completely puzzled; he stared at the paper and then he stared at the lady. Shrewd and able man of the world as he was, he thought he had read Miss Lodega's character at a glance. She was an adventuress; she had entered Calderwood's service and then had entrapped him into a marriage, for to the mind of the lawyer it was a clear impossibility for such a man as Calderwood to marry such a woman as Miss Lodega unless he was infatuated, and so lost to all sense of reason. It was plain to him the lady had attempted to entrap the gentleman but had been trapped herself.

"Blank!" the woman muttered, utterly unnerved by the sudden and unexpected blow.

"Not the least bit of writing upon it!"

"And yet, with my own eyes I saw the name of Mr. Calderwood, my own name and the names of the minister and the two witnesses inscribed upon it."

"You are sure that you haven't made any mistake about the matter?" Never in all his personal experience had he ever encountered such a peculiar case.

"What mistake, sir, could I make?" the lady asked, plaintively. "The certificate was given into my own hands; with my own eyes I saw that it was correctly filled out. In such a case as this, when all that I held dear in the world was at stake, do you suppose I would not be careful? Again I say I am no child, but a woman who has passed through sad and bitter experiences. I was on my guard, for I feared treachery; my experience of mankind has not been a pleasant one, and from early youth I have always been on the watch against deceit. I will say frankly that I doubted Mr. Calderwood; it did not appear possible that a man situated as I supposed he was situated—for I firmly believed, and do believe even now, that he was a very wealthy man—should take a fancy to such a woman as I am, working for my daily bread; but he did; he protested that he did, and urged me on to this secret marriage. I consented, but I kept my eyes open all the time. I was afraid of my good fortune. This certificate was as precious to me as the apple of my eye, and from the moment it came into my hands I have guarded it with scrupulous care."

"There has not been any chance, then, for any one to take it and replace it with another?"

Miss Lodega hesitated for a moment; anxiously she ran her mind back over all that had happened since the night when she had yielded to the persuasive eloquence of silver-tongued Ethelwold Calderwood and consented to a secret marriage with him. But the effort was in vain; she could not remember any opportunity for the substitution of the certificate and the replacing it with a false one.

"No, it is impossible," she said, at last; "it could not have been done. The paper has never left me; night and day have I guarded it; besides, I am sure it is the certificate I received. I folded it with my own hands and placed it in its envelope."

"How do you account for this, then?" the lawyer asked, an idea creeping into his head, as it had into the head of the doctor that the

lady's brains might not be quite so clear as at the first glance they appeared.

"There is only one way to account for it!" she exclaimed, with an intense and fiery energy; "I have fallen into the hands of a skillful and desperate band of rogues. Calderwood was murdered by them for some purpose to me unknown, although I guess it is to possess themselves of his money and estates in England, for that he had both money and estates in England I am sure, although Allister, who was his confidential man of business, declares that he did not; but Allister, I am sure, is one of this terrible band, who, working in the dark, are giving such fearful blows. They fear me; they fear that I will unravel this dreadful mystery, and they have taken due precautions to stop my mouth. As the wife of Ethelwold Calderwood, the courts of justice would be compelled to listen to me, so they seek to strip me of the title, but their efforts will be in vain; they shall not crush, they shall not silence me, although I am but one weak woman against a host, perhaps."

The indomitable will of the woman shone plainly in her face, but the more she talked the more the legal gentleman became persuaded that her wits were a little disordered.

"My dear madam," he said, soothingly, after reflecting about the affair for a few minutes in silence, "I do not really see at present how to proceed in this matter; there is really nothing at all but surmise to go upon. The doctor of whom you speak stands as high as any medical man in the county—in the State for that matter. He could not be bought, I am sure; knowingly he would not lend himself to any deception. I do not really see how we can get at this case; if you will find the minister and the witnesses in New York who were present at your marriage to Mr. Calderwood, why then if you choose to make a fight in regard to the will, if there is any property worth fighting about, we will have some foundation to work upon, but, as the case stands at present, I should advise you to take the five thousand dollars according to the bequest in the will."

"That is your advice, sir?" the lady asked, in a very thoughtful way.

"Yes, madam, it is; extremely disinterested advice, too, since it affords me no chance for a fee."

"But I am not satisfied to give up if there is any chance for me at all," she declared, rising. "I will take your advice though about going to New York. Before I sleep to-night I will know whether those witnesses are in the land of the living, so that I can reach them, or whether they too have been spirited away like the signatures from the marriage certificate."

"Do so, by all means; you will be satisfied in your own mind, and if you succeed in finding proof then you will give me something to work on."

Then, just as the doctor had bowed the lady politely from his office, so the lawyer did likewise.

With a pale face but a pleasant smile, although bitter, impotent rage was tearing at her heart, Miss Lodega departed.

True to her word, though, she did not return to the Highlands but took the train direct for New York.

And after arriving in the city as she progressed up-town how the memory of all the events of the night, when with Calderwood she had sought the minister's house, came trooping back to her!

She had not taken the trouble to set down the name of the street nor the number of the house, for both were graven firmly on the tablets of her memory.

The street was one of the small, quiet, up-town ones running from the avenues to the North river.

She went directly to the spot. She had a wonderful memory, and the dull green door, a relic of a bygone age, with its brass numbers and old-fashioned door-plate, which bore the inscription:

REV. OBADIAH HETAKER, was as fresh in her memory as though she had been accustomed to seeing them all her life.

She recognized the house long before she came to it, but when she stood in front of it a most unwelcome surprise came to her.

The house was all right, a modest two-storied brick; the green door was all right; also the quaint brass numbers, but the plate bearing the name of the minister was missing.

The woman's breath came hard and fast, and she stood and stared, statue-like, at the door.

Was it possible that this last hope was about to slip from her grasp?

For a moment after making this startling and unexpected discovery she thought that she would yield to the natural weakness of woman-kind and faint, and had she not been made of sterner stuff than the majority of her sex undoubtedly she would have done so, for she now felt sure that she was not destined to find the people she sought, the more so as a little card affixed to the side of the house announced "FURNISHED FIRST FLOOR TO LET."

And in the front room of the first floor, the parlor, she had been married!

Determined to know the worst at once she ascended the steps and rung the bell.

A slatternly-looking woman answered the summons who stared with undisguised envy at Miss Lodega's costly robes!

"Does the Reverend Obadiah Hetaker live here?" she asked.

The woman shook her head.

"But he did live here?"

"Oh, yes, perhaps he might, but it was afore I came to the house."

"And how long have you resided here?"

"Six months."

Miss Lodega stared, and again her face grew strangely pale. She felt as if the very ground was being cut away from beneath her feet.

"The gentleman I seek was a minister and lived here about two weeks ago; I called on him then; his name was on the door."

Now it was the woman's turn to stare.

"Oh, you have made some mistake, ma'am!" she exclaimed. "I have lived here six months and I'll take my oath that no minister ever lived here in that time. The last family that lived here was called Smith; the man wasn't no better than he ought to be, I guess, for he paid by the week and they all got out between two days like as if they were afraid the police was after them. He was a tallish man with a beard."

The woman had described the minister exactly.

"You have no idea of where he moved to?"

"Not a bit; better ask the police; maybe they can tell you."

Baffled at all points, which way must she turn now?

CHAPTER XII.

A FEARFUL DOOM.

THE circular, cave-like vault, the secret haunt of the thieves, had been cunningly contrived. It had been excavated below a yard of one of the houses on the street, and so contrived that entrance to it could be gained from two of the adjoining cellars by means of the cleverly-executed turn-table doors. The two entrances had been arranged so that in case of a surprise by the police, while they were entering by one door the inmates of the burrow could escape by another.

In the adjoining cellar the masked men sat down to wait for the decision of the victim who had walked so willingly into the trap.

A lantern placed upon the rickety old steps which led to the floor above afforded light.

There were three or four old boxes scattered about the cellar, and upon these the rogues seated themselves.

"You t'ink he vill a-weaken, eh?" asked one of the gang, inquiringly, and from the accent it was plain that it was the Frenchman who spoke.

"He either weakens or dies," the leader of the band replied, with savage determination.

"Why play wiz him at all?" the Frenchman inquired, anxiously. "Why not finish him at once? It is no good wiz ze edged tools to play; you comprehend, eh?"

"Henri, you are altogether too skeery," the leader rejoined. "We have got a big fish in our net this time, and if we play our cards rightly, maybe it will be the biggest capture we have ever made."

"I do comprehend all dat. Sang Dieu! You t'ink I do not know dis diable of a Phenix? He is ze only man I am afraid of, but I do not like him; he is ze man of iron—blood and iron. He is one grand man! I fear him! Ze sooner he is put into his leetle bed ze better!"

"I t'ink I can make Joe Phenix living worth much more to us than Joe Phenix dead."

All the rest of the band stared at this bold assertion of their leader; this was something they did not understand.

"He is worth not much to us as long as he do live," Red Henri grumbled. "Except that he is likely to get us all hanged one of these fine days."

"Suppose we get him to join our band?"

There was a grumble of dissent at this. Not that the rascals wouldn't be proud to have such a man as the renowned thief-taker in their ranks, but they hadn't the slightest belief that such a thing could be accomplished.

The chief understood the meaning of the exclamation well enough, and he laughed scornfully in reply.

"Ah, you don't think it can be done?"

"It vill be difficult; zis Phenix is a bold bird—a cunning bird; you no put salt on his tail easy, upon my word!" the Frenchman asserted.

"Isn't life worth as much to him as to any man?" the chief demanded. "Isn't he here in our power, doomed to death unless he satisfies us in some way?"

"Oh, yes; zat is ze truth."

"Suppose we make him a fair offer; we will give him his life if he joins our band, and a good share of the swag that we capture. With such a man as he is in our league we can make some big hauls; why, in a couple of years we could do more than all the cracksmen in the country; we could all retire rich, go off to Europe if we liked and buy titles—be counts and dukes and all that sort of thing. I tell you, boys, it is a big idea. I have had this in my head for a long

time, and that is one reason why I let Phenix be roped in, for if I hadn't had some such idea I would have been for settling him with a well-aimed shot or a good stroke with a knife after I found out that he was on our track."

"It would be a very good idea, indeed," observed one of the disguised men, who spoke with a stern and resolute voice, "but I am afraid it will not work. From what I have heard of this Phenix—of course I don't know much about him except by hearsay—I should judge that he was not the kind of man to be roped into anything of this sort even with the fear of death before his eyes."

"Well, we can make the trial: it will do no harm if it is a failure; but, from what I know of these detectives, I must say I have always found them as ready to make a 'stake' as any other men. I will make the proposal anyway, and if he refuses, why then we can start the water-works."

The gang nodded assent to this, but it was true they had not the least faith that Phenix would listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he e'er so wisely.

The chief got up from his seat, took the box upon which he had been seated and carried it to the wall of the cellar; then, standing upon it, he brought his mouth up to the level of a pipe fixed in the upper part of the wall, and which evidently led through into the other cellar, the circular walled vault of the secret gang.

"Hallo, Phenix!" he cried, again assuming the Irish brogue in order to disguise his voice.

"Hallo!" came back the answer through the tube.

"Have you reflected on my proposition?"

"I have."

"And what is your decision—are you ready to make terms?"

"I am."

At this the leader of the gang turned around and nodded triumphantly to the rest of the band.

The Frenchman, though, was not convinced. "Aha, ve vill see vat ze terms are, eh?" he muttered.

And all the others ducked their heads in assent; they shared the Frenchman's unbelief.

When the bloodhound joined the wolves' pack then might such a man-hunter as Joe Phenix league himself with the rascals whom he gloried in hunting down.

"Well, what terms do you propose?" the leader of the gang asked.

"Isn't that for you to say?"

"You see he is willing to listen to us," said the leader, again addressing the band; they nodded, but for all that they were not sanguine in regard to a favorable issue to the negotiation.

"Phenix, to be honest with you, you are in an extremely tight place!" the head rascal exclaimed through the pipe.

"I have been in tighter ones in my time," the thief-taker returned, with perfect coolness.

"Oh, no, you are wrong there; you have never been nearer death in all your life than you are now."

"I don't really see how that can be. True, I am down here in the bowels of the earth, and don't exactly know how to get out, but I have my weapons, and before I yield up my life you may rest assured I shall use them to the best of my ability."

"Your weapons will not be of the slightest avail against the single one we shall use against you."

"Perhaps not, but I shall believe that when I see it," the detective replied, coolly.

"You will be convinced the moment you know what it is without waiting for the proof of eyesight. But to the terms; probably by this time you are aware that you are not dealing with any common street gang—no everyday band, but an organization, carefully formed, powerful, and one not easily broken up."

"The police authorities give you due credit," Phenix assented, in the calm tone so usual with him.

"New York, since it was a city, never held within its limits a stronger band than the Brothers of the Skeleton Keys; each and every one is a cracksmen of repute, no bunglers, but every man can boast that he is known to the police as a workman possessing both skill and daring; I say every man, but I ought to make one exception—"

"That is yourself!" interrupted the police spy; "you are not known, but you will be, very soon; clever as you think yourself you will be run to earth."

"I am taking my chances on that," the outlaw chief answered, carelessly, "but if the rest don't succeed any better than you have, and you bear the reputation of being the best man in the business in the country, it is likely that I shall have a good swing of it; but now to come to our mutton: we need, to complete our organization, just such a man as you are; join us and we can laugh to scorn the efforts of the authorities to break up our band; we are pretty well served now in certain quarters, but we want to be better served."

"I understand what you mean: some of the men at head-quarters are your tools or else you

would not have been on your guard against my attempt.

"We are well served, but we want you."

"It is impossible; I am no such man; but I will give you my word of honor that I will not betray the secret of your hiding-place nor make use of the knowledge to break you up, although I shall pursue you to the bitter end in other ways."

"There is no alternative but to join us or to die."

"Come on then and see how bold a fight, and how good a one, I will make for my life!"

"Fight this, then! Turn on the water, boys!" the outlaw cried.

And then into the vault where Phenix stood, surrounded by utter darkness, poured a stream of water.

It came from the roof of the vault and fell with a dull swash upon the floor. The secret band had tapped the water-pipe, and a fearful death by drowning they designed for the police spy.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW HOPE.

NEVER was there a human in this world more thoroughly bewildered than this semi-female bloodhound who had followed so closely on the trail. But she had been baffled at every point. She, cunning, shrewd and unscrupulous, careless of the means so long as success was reached at last, had been utterly outwitted.

And now, to tell the truth, he it confessed that Miss Helen Lodega was an adventuress—a woman whose past life would not bear investigation—a daring, resolute woman, indifferent to risk when a rich prize was in view. She was a lady, born and bred; if all had gone well with her in this life, a better person it would have been hard to find, but the iron of adversity had entered her soul; she had been trodden down by poverty until all the finer feelings of her nature had been crushed out. She had come to worship money, for money to her represented ease and comfort, and she was willing to plot, and scheme, and debase herself to gain the goal she sought.

And when she had entered Mr. Calderwood's house and by a thousand graceful feminine arts had attracted the attention of her employer, she believed that at last success was about to crown her efforts. She did succeed. Mr. Calderwood wooed her as hotly as though he had been a youth of twenty and she a girl in her teens, his first love.

She had been coy, played the cautious woman, afraid even of herself, and at last, by various cunning devices, brought him to the point she wished. He proposed marriage, and she, after expressing a hundred fears, at last consented. That the marriage was to be a secret one did not surprise or alarm her, for she understood human nature well enough to realize that for such a man as Mr. Calderwood to marry his housekeeper—a woman almost unknown to him and with neither social position nor fortune to commend her, was a surprising thing, and it was only natural that, for a time, he should wish to keep the matter a secret.

But, although she was convinced the gentleman was madly in love with her, and she did not believe that he would attempt to play any trick upon her, for he was no such man, yet with careful firmness she determined to take all necessary precautions, just as if she believed that her betrothed was one of the biggest rogues and scoundrels in the world.

No mock marriage, no false minister would do for her; and so, on the night of the ceremony, she had been careful to keep her eyes open, intoxicated with joy though she was.

She had noted the street—the number of the house and the name of the minister upon the door-plate; and this more than all else convinced her that there was no deception intended. The minister, too, was a tall, stately man, with his sacred profession written in his very face; and then the two witnesses to the marriage, the two women, one the housekeeper, the other the maid-of-all-work, whom the minister had called in when he had ascertained that his visitors had come without friends, he remarking that witnesses were necessary and that it would have been better if they had brought some friends with them; then his taking her aside and carefully questioning in regard to the affair—if she had come of her own free will, and if she was fully aware of the sacred nature of the compact into which she was about to enter—if this was all a fraud, a cheat, in the name of wonder what cunning brain had planned the trick so carefully?

Minister, witnesses, door-plate, all had vanished and left no more traces behind them than if they had never existed and were but the baseless fabric of a dream.

But what was the meaning of it all? Why had she been the victim of such a cruel deception? What was the object of it? Was Calderwood a villain? Was he determined to secure her for his prize without paying the price that she demanded for her own fair person? She could not believe it! Rather, she chose to think that both she and the man to whom she had

freely given herself had been deceived; that both of them had been in the snare of a gigantic conspiracy, which had succeeded only too well. Mr. Calderwood was of an easy and confiding nature; it was possible—more than possible; it seemed to her, almost certain—that he had confided his intention of making her his wife to some other person; and if he had reposed such confidence in anybody, it was sure to be his confidential man of business, John Allister, and John Allister was a deep, designing person. She was confident that she had read him thoroughly before she had known him two hours. Allister was one who would not stop at anything to accomplish his purpose.

The plot to do away with Calderwood was maturing when she had first entered Calderwood Hall; her presence there, and the liking that the owner of the mansion had for her, threatened to interfere with the success of the plot. Her marriage to Calderwood was a terrible blow to the conspirators, for, as his wife, she would surely do battle for her rights, and naturally attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding his untimely taking off; therefore, she must be guarded against. What was more likely than that Calderwood, naturally indolent, should intrust all the details of the secret marriage to Allister, and how easy was it for him, with the terrible purpose he had in view, to provide a false minister, and so arrange it that all proofs of the marriage should disappear as if by magic?

This, she was confident, was the solution of the mystery.

And now, utterly discomfited, what was she to do?

She had walked leisurely toward the avenue, revolving these thoughts in her mind, when suddenly to her remembrance came the words of the woman in regard to consulting the police.

Groping blindly in the dark as she was, a detective appeared to her as a possible ray of light.

It was the last chance, for, if a detective was unable to help to unravel the mystery, she knew not what to do.

But, where was she to find a detective?

She applied to the first policeman she saw for an answer to the question, and the officer directed her to the police headquarters in Mulberry street, but when she arrived there, and made known her business to the official in charge, he listened politely—even police officials are polite to good-looking women—and after informing her that the inquiry she wished to set on foot was a little out of their line, suggested that she had better call on some private detective, who would take the case in hand for a reasonable fee.

Miss Lodega thanked the officer for the advice, and inquired the address of the best private detective that was to be had.

"There is none better in the business than Phenix—Joe Phenix," he answered, "and you will find him at No. — Wall street."

Again thanking the gentleman for his kindness, the lady withdrew, and down-town for Wall street she started.

The office of the private detective was easily found, and upon entering, Miss Lodega was confronted by a tall, well-built, stern-faced man.

"Mr. Phenix?" she asked.

"I represent him, miss," the gentleman replied, hastening to place a chair for his visitor. "Be seated, if you please."

"But, my business is very important, and I presume I ought to see Mr. Phenix in person," she remarked, hesitatingly.

"I attend to all the office business, miss, and I assure you that your affairs, if you will be good enough to confide them to me, shall have prompt dispatch."

Thus reassured, Miss Lodega proceeded to relate all the strange particulars regarding the death of Ethelwold Calderwood, and the efforts to penetrate into the truth of the matter.

The gentleman listened attentively, but with an impassive face, and for the life of her, with all her shrewdness, she could not tell what impression the story had made upon him.

She concluded the recital at last.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," she had not omitted a single circumstance, and had detailed everything with a clearness and brevity that would not have disgraced the smartest reporter.

"It is a very strange affair," he remarked, reflectively.

"I am glad that you think so!" she reassured him; "for you are the only one to whom I have told my suspicions who did not instantly get the idea that I was not right in my mind the moment they heard what I had to say. The doctor was indignant at the very idea of taking up the body, and the lawyer said that, as far as he could see, although there were some strange circumstances connected with the affair, yet there was not the slightest ground to hang suspicion upon, for, although he might not have died a natural death, yet there was no reason why any one should desire his death—no motive for the crime apparent, and crimes are never committed without motives."

"He meant, I suppose, that on the surface it did not appear that there was any one who would profit very largely by Mr. Calderwood's

death. In fact, the legacy left to you is the largest if, as this Mr. Allister states, it is true the real estate is mortgaged for all that it is worth."

"Yes, sir; and I could see that the idea was in his mind, if anybody had a motive for murdering Mr. Calderwood it was myself; but, of course, he did not express this to me."

"I presume not, and then both doctor and lawyer being satisfied that there wasn't any motive for killing Mr. Calderwood, were quite sure there had not been any foul play, but that he had died a natural death?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now, if some one was able to show them that there was a motive for his death—that a very large sum of money could be obtained by Mr. Calderwood's death, while nothing at all was to be hoped for from Mr. Calderwood living, do you think they would change their opinion?"

The lady's breath came hard and fast; the man seemed to be speaking as if he had some knowledge in regard to the affair.

"Oh, sir, is it possible that you know anything of this strange mystery?" she asked, eagerly.

"Very little more than yourself, but, by one of the odd coincidences that sometimes happen in this world, the task of looking into all the particulars of the death of Ethelwold Calderwood was put into my hands this morning, for foul play is suspected."

"It is?"

"Yes; and there was a powerful motive for his death by violence."

"And what was that motive?"

"His life was insured for sixty thousand dollars!"

The lady stared in amazement.

"Insured in six different companies, for ten thousand dollars apiece. Naturally, like all insurance companies, they don't want to pay if they can help it, particularly as they had all received very little money from him in the shape of premiums, and you may rest assured, miss, that neither money nor time will be spared to learn the truth."

Miss Lodega had found a strong ally at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BROTHER.

IN a sumptuously-furnished front parlor of the Brevoort House, that peculiarly English New York hotel, sat two men on the evening of the very day that Miss Lodega had had the interview with Joe Phenix—or Joe Phenix's representative, for it was a hard matter for those not personally acquainted with the noted detective to tell whether they had seen Phenix or not, for it was that gentleman's policy never to reveal himself to strangers if he could possibly avoid it. He believed that he could better catch rascals by keeping himself unknown than by making himself such common property that every second man in the street as he passed along would nudge his neighbor and say, "There goes the famous thief-taker, Joe Phenix!"

One of the two men in the room is well known to our readers; John Allister, the confidential man of business of the dead Ethelwold Calderwood; but the acquaintance of the other the reader has yet to make.

He was a rather tall, slenderly-built gentleman, a man apparently of thirty-five or thereabouts, dressed with a sort of studied carelessness and with an air about him that strongly suggested a sailor, or a traveler who had spent a great part of his time at sea. He had an oval face, quite deeply bronzed, like one who had been much exposed to sun and wind. His hair was a dark brown, cropped short after the idiotic fashion common to young "bloods" of this day, who apparently think that a "State prison crop" is the proper sort of thing; the face was smoothly shaven, although around the mouth traces of a heavy, dark beard could plainly be distinguished. But the eyes were the strange features of the face; they were a blue-gray, and quite changeable in their appearance, one moment seeming to be light gray in color, and the next dark-blue, as the light reached or did not reach them.

This gentleman was the guest of the hotel, just arrived that afternoon, and Mr. Allister had called upon him as soon as he was notified by telegraph of the other's presence in the city. He had arrived in the White Star Line steamer, City of Berlin, which had made the port of New York that morning.

Upon the hotel register, in a terribly bad hand, he had inscribed:

MARMADUKE CALDERWOOD, LONDON, ENG.

As he said, laughingly, to the clerk:

"For the past five years I have been more used to grasping a tiller or holding the reins of a half-wild horse than employing myself in keeping my penmanship up to the standard."

The hotel clerk, an expert, instantly "took his measure." This was a bold Briton, one of the hardy sons of the little-big island who had been amusing himself by yachting all around the world, journeying, like Lord Lovel, renowned in nursery tales, "strange countries for to see."

"Awful bore, you know," he condescended to explain to the clerk—"this dry land after a man has been so long at sea; 'pon my honor I feel like a fish out of water."

The hotel clerk, an acute reader of human nature, at once set Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood down as a swell of the first water.

And this was the brother of the man about whose death there seemed to be such a terrible mystery—the roving sailor brother who had come across the sea to claim the inheritance left him by the deceased gentleman.

He had left orders at the office that if any one called upon him to show the party up at once, and one of the first things he did after arriving at the hotel was to send a telegram to Allister announcing the fact of his arrival.

And as promptly as possible the confidential man of business had hurried to New York, reaching the hotel just in time to join the Englishman at supper, and at the time when we bring the reader into their conference they had just sat down to enjoy a quiet smoke after the meal.

"Now then, old boy, fire away and let me know all that has occurred," the new-comer remarked, between the puffs of cigar smoke. "I am totally ignorant of everything, you know."

"Shall I begin at the beginning?"

"Of course, my dear fellow; you wouldn't commence in the middle or at the end, would you?"

"All right. Well, Mr. Calderwood, your brother, Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood—"

"Yes, by the way, do you think there is much resemblance between the dear departed and myself?" the Englishman asked, abruptly interrupting the speaker.

"Very little; the expression of the face is something like, and your eyes resemble his somewhat," Allister replied, after a very careful survey of the other.

"But you would never take us to be brothers, eh?"

"No, I should not."

"His sedentary life, you see, told on him, while I have been a wild sea-rover, a bird of passage, sipping the dew from every flower in every clime; that is a rather poetical idea, eh, old fellow?" observed the heir of Calderwood, carelessly flipping the ashes from his cigar end.

"Extremely so; well, to resume: Mr. Calderwood took cold, and after a very brief illness died."

"And the disease?"

"A sort of lung fever proceeding from the cold."

"So the doctors said, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I presume that my afflicted brother had all the medical advice that money could procure?"

"Oh, yes; the best doctors in the neighborhood were called, and they held a consultation to which one of the most eminent physicians in the country was invited—a New York doctor who has a country residence at Shrewsbury."

"And they were all quite satisfied in regard to the disease?"

"Yes, sir; there wasn't the least doubt about it; it was perfectly plain."

"That is very good!" the other commented, with a decided appearance of satisfaction. "It is such a comfort, you know, to have these learned medical gentlemen agree with each other. As a general rule each one thinks that the other is an ass, and although they may not say it openly, yet it is their private opinion."

"Very true; but these gentlemen were all of one mind. Mr. Calderwood died, and Mr. Calderwood was buried, and then Miss Helen Lodge suddenly made her appearance."

"Yes." The Englishman was paying close attention now, with a very peculiar look in his cat-like eyes.

"She announced that she was the widow of the dead man; said that she had been privately married to Mr. Calderwood, in New York."

"At which intelligence you were no doubt greatly astonished."

"More than astonished—I was disgusted!" Allister exclaimed, emphatically.

The other lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Such little things will happen sometimes, you know!" and the speaker laughed again, displaying his teeth in a sort of cruel, tiger-like way.

"I would not have believed that Mr. Calderwood could have been guilty of any such piece of gross folly!" Allister remarked, bitterly.

"By Jove, old fellow, you are not complimentary to the dear departed!"

"It is the truth!" the other replied, firmly.

"And being the truth makes it no less unpleasant to hear. You mustn't be too hard on the poor fellow. He got infatuated, that is the honest truth; he wanted the woman and he was determined to have her, no matter what the cost."

"I am afraid that it may cost him, or his heirs, rather, more than he bargained for."

"How so? Explain, for now I am in the dark."

"She was not satisfied with the bequest allowed her in the will; she declared that Calderwood had been murdered, and announced her

intention of devoting the rest of her life to hunting down the murderers."

"Quite dramatic! A scene from the current melodrama, or a leaf from the last popular novel," the Englishman observed, in a flippant manner; and yet the expression playing around the corners of his cruel mouth, and the peculiar light shining in his eyes, would have warned the close observer that the man was in anything but a pleasant mood.

"She is intent on mischief then?" he queried.

"You can judge best in regard to that when I relate what she has done. She has seen the doctor and wanted the body dug up; he laughed at the idea, of course; then she consulted a lawyer, and while there discovered that the marriage certificate upon which she relied was only a piece of blank paper without even as much as a mark of the scrape of a pen on it! Then she hired the grave-digger to watch the cemetery by night, as she had an idea that the grave would be tampered with. His adventures there border on the marvelous, and whether he encountered humans or spirits is more than he can tell. Then she came to New York and set out to hunt up the minister and the witnesses to her marriage. The errand was a fruitless one; she could not discover the slightest trace."

"Well, about that time I should have thought she would have come to the conclusion that she was wasting time?"

"On the contrary, she went straight to police headquarters, told her story, and the chief, telling her that he had no power to help her, advised her to call upon Joe Phenix, the private detective; and she did so at once, and held an interview with him for a good two hours, this afternoon."

"Really an indefatigable woman; and what passed between her and this Phenix?"

"My spies were not able to tell that."

"Phenix will not be apt to bother his head with the matter."

"Oh, yes, he will, for the companies with whom the life insurance is placed have got an idea into their heads that there is something wrong about the matter, and they have placed the case in Phenix's hands to work up."

"Well, well, it looks as if it was going to be a deuced lot of trouble, then, for me to get my little sixty thousand dollars," Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood remarked.

CHAPTER XV.

A SOUTH AMERICAN.

AS we have stated in an early part of our tale, the Frenchman, commonly known as Red Henri, kept a small restaurant in what is locally called the French quarter—Greene street, near Prince, only two blocks from Broadway.

The street of which we speak from Broome street upward for two or three blocks has been so Frenchified, so densely populated by the sons and daughters of Gaul—flower-makers, hair-dressers, candy manufacturers, French laundries and bakers—that it looks for all the world as if a slice of *la belle Paris* had been bodily transported to the New World; that is, if one could close the eyes to the extremely filthy condition of the street itself—a condition of things most common to New York but not to the French metropolis.

In the middle of the block was the saloon of the refugee—the man who, beyond a doubt, had left his country for his country's good.

It was a dingy, dirty basement, and a painted sign bore the inscription:

PENSION FRANÇAIS.

BY HENRI LOUIS PHILLIP DE CENTRELLE.

The Frenchman was a Red Republican of the fiercest type and yet he prided himself highly on his high-sounding name.

But, as we stated when we first introduced the Gaul to the reader's notice, his Red Republicanism and his restaurant-keeping were alike cloaks to hide his real calling.

The restaurant was little better than a house of call for all the big rascals in the country.

But no low, common fellows were welcome there; only the master-spirits of the art—the expert forgers who played for a thousand or more at a single stake—the mechanical geniuses who planned bank robberies where fifty to a hundred thousand dollars were to be had at a blow—all the daring blades whose wonderful exploits elevate their precarious calling almost to the dignity of a science.

It was commonly estimated by well-informed detectives that more first-class "jobs" had been arranged at French Henri's than at any three other similar resorts in the whole country.

But the place was well conducted; the police were never called upon to suppress any rows, and if the opinion of the neighbors was asked, one and all would have testified that it was as quiet a place of the kind as could be found in the city.

As the sign indicated to one familiar with European matters, the place furnished sleeping accommodations as well as meals and liquid refreshments.

But, very little transient business was done, for the proprietor was not anxious to have any

strangers who might develop inquiring minds around; once in a while a customer would drop in, and, as soon as the Frenchman satisfied himself that there wasn't any danger to be apprehended from the man's presence, he was permitted to remain until his money was exhausted, and then he was promptly shown to the door, unless indeed the man promised to be useful to the secret gang of which the Frenchman was a bright and shining light. Three or four times Henri had managed to pick up a tool who had been extremely useful—desperate men, ready for anything, and possessing the rare merit of being entirely unknown to the police.

Just as sure as a foreign rogue, a Frenchman particularly, was forced to fly from the land that gave him birth and found his way to the New World, just so sure he made his way to Red Henri's, confident that he would receive a welcome, assistance if he needed it, and would probably be put in the way of a good job.

So, when a stranger applied for accommodation the Frenchman at once set out to discover whether the man could be made useful or not, and it seldom took him long to find this out.

Many a strange customer had the host of the "Pension Français" entertained, but the strangest of them all had lately come into the place.

A big, muscular fellow; swarthy in face, almost, as an Indian; tolerably well-dressed in what had once been a very expensive suit of clothes, but wretched bad usage more than actual wear, had done away with their pristine appearance.

The man was a foreigner, although he spoke English very well, but the Frenchman, with all his knowledge of the world, was a little puzzled to determine his nationality.

The fellow was evidently on a prolonged and most extensive spree when he made his entry into Red Henri's domicile, and that individual at once took him under his fostering care, for the "pigeon" looked worthy of the plucking, and stray "pigeons" of this kind were plucked once in a while if they happened to stray into the Pension Français, and in a most scientific manner.

Soon the man took a liking to the "hotel;" the food suited him, and the liquor agreed with his palate; and such a swallow as the fellow had astonished even the veteran Frenchman; but the game that Red Henri had proposed when the man had made his first appearance in the saloon wouldn't work, for the bird wasn't worth the plucking.

The first time the man had drank himself in, sensible, the Frenchman had examined his pockets. He only had a few dollars, but from some papers which were concealed within the lining of his vest (and which, upon discovering, the Frenchman had eagerly possessed himself of, fondly hoping before they were extracted from their hiding-place that they were bank bills) he found that the stranger was a South American, a native of Brazil, by name Pedro Spores, that he had been confidential clerk in a banking-house in Rio Janeiro and had absconded with quite a large sum of money, for a Personal advertisement from the *New York Herald* which the man had evidently cut out and preserved, addressed to him, and signed by the banking firm in whose employ he had been, contained an appeal to return the important papers which he had taken, as they were of no use to him, and to be satisfied with the money.

That the man had done so was probable as he had no other papers, and Red Henri shrewdly suspected that he carried all that he had in the world on his person.

From some memoranda that the man had the Frenchman became possessed of the particulars of the man's crime as well as though he had been on the spot when the event happened.

The confidential clerk had abused his opportunities and had used his employer's money, intending of course to return it, but the luck upon which he had depended to enable him to return the money never came, and, at last, finding that detection was inevitable, he made the one desperate plunge that transformed the so-called honest man into the known rascal.

Possessed of this knowledge the Frenchman cogitated for awhile. It was apparent to him that the man was about at the end of his rope. When the few dollars he had in his pocket were gone what would he do? Procure employment of some kind? Perhaps, yet from what he had told to his host it was plain that he had not attempted to do anything of the kind since coming to the city.

A man of powerful frame, totally unknown, possessed of more than average intelligence, if he could be handled rightly he would be almost invaluable to certain parties.

The Frenchman made up his mind to question the South American and find out what he thought of the matter.

In time the man awoke from his drunken sleep. He demanded more liquor at once and drew out his money to pay for it.

The Frenchman had been careful to replace both the money and the papers, so that his curious investigation into the stranger's affairs should not be suspected by him.

"One year, three years," exclaimed the man,

counting the money down upon the counter, "take them all, Monsieur Parleyvou, and give me the credit if you please. It won't take me long to drink the money up, and then—"

"And what then, my friend?" Henri inquired.

"Zat is more as I can say!" the man replied, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I cannot starve—I must find money somewheres."

"And where vill zat be, *mon ami*? Money does not lie in ze streets about waiting to be up picked."

"It does sometimes," the other replied, with a very significant look upon his dark face. "I am vat you call broke—no money and no friends; am I then to starve?"

"Oh, good heaven forbid! To starve is dreadful. I would not starve as long as I had a good fist at the end of my arm."

"You would use it, eh?" queried the man, tossing down the glassful of fiery liquor the Frenchman had poured out, at a single gulp.

"I would! upon my soul and body I would!"

"And so will I!" cried the man, fiercely. "To starve! it is the coward's act, so long as there be good gold and silver in the world to be had for the taking. Is there in the city a man you hate?" and he leaned over the counter and almost hissed the question into the ear of the host. "Show him to me! For fifty dollars I will send him to te odder world. Think not I a boast make. I will be so good as my word. I can handle ze steel so well as any man in te world. There is no water in my veins; it is all rich blood!"

"Take another glass! You are a *man*!" cried Henri, pushing the bottle over to the other.

"Ob, I am not afraid of blood! I am all steel and fire. Show me a chance to make ze money and I vill laugh at ze police!"

"You shall come wiz me to-night!" the Frenchman replied, eagerly seizing upon the chance. "I vill introduce you to some brave gentlemen who make money by ze handfuls. Zey vill be glad to know such a man as you are. Zey vill show you a shance to make money if your heart is in ze right place."

"You are my friend—my brother!" exclaimed the other, with all the warmth due to his race. "I care not for te risk? I am an out-cast from ze land of my birth; I cannot starve! te world has wronged me and therefore I strike back. I vill be with you to-night, heart and soul."

The tool was secured, much to the Frenchman's delight.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

A NEW-COMER had arrived at Red Bank—Red Bank on the Navesink, or North Shrewsbury, as the natives of the region, the New Jerseyites, persist in calling it, in defiance of the fact that Navesink is the ancient name of the stream, which, for its length, (it is only eight or nine miles long,) is the prettiest tide-water river in the United States.

It was rather early for the advent of summer visitors, although many of the cottagers already had come down.

Monmouth county, New Jersey, along its coast in summer time is one vast hive of city folks, domiciled by the "sad sea waves."

The stranger put up at the Globe hotel, in the village—the principal one in the "Bank," as the natives affectionately term their town.

He was a tall, well-built man, with a serious, even sad face, and, being dressed in black, had an extremely ministerial look about him.

Robert Thomas was the name he inscribed upon the hotel register, and in casual conversation he gave the hotel people to understand that he was a literary man, somewhat overworked, who had been ordered to the country for rest and recuperation by his medical adviser.

He was a very quiet, silent sort of person, who rarely did much talking, but sat in the saloon of the hotel, which was office, saloon, and billiard-room combined, and listened to the conversation, always tolerably brisk, of the loungers, the gossips of the village, who came in regularly to read the New York newspapers of the host, monopolized the great arm-chairs, stared at all strangers, but seldom showed the color of their money at the bar.

After he had been in the village a day or two, and had spent a large portion of his time in pedestrian excursions all about the neighborhood, he pronounced the town one of the pleasantest he had ever been in, and said he should not mind settling down in the neighborhood for the rest of his life.

As he explained to one of the frequenters of the hotel—a retired sea-captain, who knew everybody and everything connected with the village, and with whom he had scraped quite an acquaintance—he had an idea, in conjunction with a medical friend of his, in the city, of opening a sort of country home for the accommodation of overworked people, literary folks, business men, etc., and would like to get hold of a handsome place, which could be had cheap, mentioning

that he understood the Calderwood mansion at the Highlands could be had at a reasonable figure.

This, of course, turned the conversation to the subject of the late owner of Calderwood Hall, and it was not very long before the quiet stranger, without apparently betraying any particular interest in the subject, or asking many questions, knew fully as much about the dead man as was known in the village.

"Mr. Thomas" had such an honest, innocent way with him that it really invited confidence.

And, in pursuance of this design of establishing a hygienic home, the gentleman called upon the leading doctor of this village, the medical gentleman, by the way, who had attended the late Mr. Calderwood, to inquire his opinion about the healthiness of the location.

The doctor perceived at once that his visitor was a gentleman, a well-informed man, and was apparently quite earnest in his purpose, and as the medical practitioner was a hearty, genuine, whole souled fellow himself, he took great pains to tell his visitor all he knew about the place.

The information gained, Mr. Thomas proceeded to explain how it was that he happened to come to Red Bank, and to know of the Calderwood property.

Miss Lodega, who had formerly been housekeeper to the owner of Calderwood Hall, had informed him that that mansion would suit him exactly, and it could probably be had cheap.

Now, as the doctor had given all the information in his power, he thought it was only fair that his visitor should give him some in return, and though he rather hated to question such an apparently simple gentleman, yet his curiosity was strong in regard to the lady, and he resolved to gratify it.

Very little information did he succeed in gaining, though, for the gentleman's acquaintance with Miss Lodega was quite slight; but, if the doctor did not succeed in his purpose, he did succeed in expressing his opinion of the lady pretty freely.

After a very pleasant interview the stranger departed, and then he went straight to call upon the lawyer who had looked into the title of the property for Mr. Calderwood, so as to see if everything was all right, but, by a mistake, he got hold of the wrong man. Instead of the party he sought, he called upon the lawyer whose counsel had been sought by Miss Lodega, and happening casually to mention her name, soon got into conversation with him in regard to the lady, for the lawyer was also curious about Miss Lodega.

And so, to sum up the matter in brief, within three days Mr. Thomas was in possession of all the facts in regard to Mr. Calderwood and his household that were known to any one in the neighborhood; and, in addition a great deal of gossip, more or less valuable, according to a man's belief.

And now, as a veracious chronicler, we must relate how it was that the stranger appeared in a new rôle, and one which the honest people of the village who had made Mr. Thomas's acquaintance would never have believed it possible for him to have assumed.

At ten o' the night this new-comer stood by the grave in Fairview cemetery, wherein reposed the mortal remains of Ethelwold Calderwood.

Two rather rough-looking, brawny men, poorly attired, with spades and picks in their hands, and some other peculiar-looking tools—a "professional" would have called them "jimmies," the cracksman's right-hand tool—and a female form, closely wrapped in dark robes, stood also by the mound.

A new moon, struggling through some heavy masses of dark clouds, afforded a dim, uncertain light.

The purpose of these intruders within the cemetery at such an untimely hour was plain; the tools that the men held in their hands indicated it.

They intended to open a grave—and, plainly, it was the grave by which they stood.

"Now, then, let's get to work, boys," Thomas observed, in a very brisk, business-like sort of way; "there is no time to lose, and we mustn't be caught at this little operation, for it wouldn't be healthy for us. Be careful with your bull's-eye, for the glimmer of the light, if it should be seen, would surely attract attention. There is very little danger of our being disturbed, though, unless we are careless about the light. Barney is on the watch at the gate, and he will give us timely warning if any one approaches, so get at it as soon as you can."

The brawny men at once went to work. Like professional grave-diggers they wielded their tools, and soon the metal of their spades struck against the top of the coffin. The loose dirt was cleared away, and then one of the men descended into the grave and proceeded, with the aid of the "jimmy," to force open the lid of the coffin.

Both the mysterious Mr. Thomas and the veiled lady watched this proceeding with a great deal of interest.

"The coffin is here, you see," he observed, to her, as the man descended into the grave.

"Yes, I cannot understand it, for I am sure

the grave was tampered with," she replied, thoughtfully. It was Helen Lodega who spoke.

"It is possible they may have removed the body and left the coffin; but we will soon know."

"The lid is loose, now, governor," the digger announced.

Taking the bull's-eye lantern, the detective—for such in truth was Mr. Thomas—descended into the grave, then he helped Miss Lodega to descend.

The man raised the coffin-lid, and the detective flashed the light of the lantern down into the gloomy abode of death.

The surmise of the detective was wrong; the body was there, but if it was the body of Ethelwold Calderwood, it was not easily to be recognized, for the face was horribly mutilated—completely disfigured!

Even the iron-nerved detective officer felt a sickening qualm as he looked upon the disgusting sight, but Miss Lodega, although a woman, never flinched.

"It is as I suspected!" she exclaimed; "this is not the body of Mr. Calderwood! That has been removed, and this substituted in its place. The whiskers are larger than his, and a little darker in color, as is also the hair."

"Are you quite certain?" asked the detective, slowly and thoughtfully.

"Yes; there is not the least doubt in my mind in regard to it," she replied, in the most positive manner.

"But the purpose of this substitution? Why has Calderwood's body been removed, and this one placed in the coffin, instead?"

"If there has been foul play, as I am sure there has, a medical examination of the body would certainly reveal it. The villains know that I am on their track—that I am determined to ferret out the mystery. They fear that in time I will succeed in having the body examined, so, in order to prevent the crime from being discovered, they have procured a body, closely resembling that of Mr. Calderwood's—probably from some hospital, and no doubt the body of a man who has died of the disease with which Mr. Calderwood was supposed to be afflicted, and so they hope to evade discovery."

"Upon my life, this is the strangest case I have ever had," the detective was constrained to confess.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LITTLE OF THE PAST.

PAUL DELAMATER, the locksmith's assistant, was not in a very happy state of mind. From early boyhood he had looked with longing eyes upon his employer's beautiful daughter, and she, apparently, had not been averse to his suit until the appearance of Calderwood, and to Calderwood Paul had taken a dislike at first sight. There was something about the man that excited his distrust; what it was, exactly, he could not tell, but, when he found that the stranger was paying particular attention to his master's daughter, and by close observation believed that he had discovered her to be pleased and flattered by the attentions, the distrust deepened into dislike.

Patiently—for he was a very patient young man—he watched the growing intimacy between the two. He was anxious—alarmed, for he could not bring himself to believe that Calderwood meant any good to the girl, after he had discovered who and what Calderwood was, although, to do that gentleman full justice, he never pretended to be otherwise than what he really was.

Paul could not believe it was possible a rich man, such as Calderwood no doubt was—a man who could win a bride from amid the first circles of New York, would deign to wed the locksmith's daughter, beautiful and accomplished though she might be.

He had even entered into conversation with the old locksmith in regard to the matter; he had not tried to discuss the topic with the father of his adored one, but the subject had come up, one day, when he and the old gentleman were in the workshop together.

Wayland had asked him what he thought of Calderwood, and Paul, frankly, had confessed his dislike. The locksmith laughed, and had asked Paul at once if one great reason for the dislike was not the fact that the stranger was paying attention to Eldorado.

Paul replied immediately that this fact had had its weight, of course, but he believed his distrust of Calderwood had not arisen from this cause alone, and then he openly questioned the old man in regard to how he felt about the matter.

Wayland did not attempt to beat about the bush but came at once to the point.

Eldorado, he said, knew enough to decide for herself; he should not attempt to sway her in the matter by even a hair's breadth; she was free to choose, and though, really, if he should attempt to persuade her in the matter, most decidedly he would throw all his influence in favor of his former apprentice, yet he thought it better for all parties that he should remain strictly neutral.

Then Paul, as delicately as he could, hinted that there was a possibility Mr. Calderwood was not acting honestly in the matter, but the

old gentleman flared up at this idea at once. As to the difference in the stations of the two, the surly old smith scouted the thought. His daughter he declared was good enough for any man in America, were his station high or low, his estate rich or poor.

Finding that the locksmith was inclined not only to be obstinate but angry on this point, Paul did not press it, as much as he regretted the blindness of the other, for he knew well enough that there was a difference in the stations of the two, and that both the parties knew it. Calderwood was condescending when he paid his addresses to the girl, and she was flattered and pleased by this condescension.

And a short time after this understanding had been arrived at by the locksmith and Paul, a strange incident had occurred.

A middle-aged man, neatly dressed, had accosted Paul when he had strolled out of the shop for an evening walk, one night after the toils of the day were done. He had begged pardon for the intrusion, and had asked if he, Paul, was not connected with the Wayland household, and upon being informed that he was, had introduced himself as being the confidential man of business of Mr. Calderwood, by name, John Allister.

Of course the young locksmith was very much surprised at being thus accosted, and was still more surprised when Allister, first stating that he trusted he would keep perfect confidence and not betray to any one any knowledge he had been spoken to, said that he wished to learn if it was true Calderwood was paying attention to the old locksmith's daughter.

And upon Paul replying in the affirmative, which he was obliged to do, although reluctantly, Allister appeared exceedingly annoyed, and he asked particularly if the young lady appeared to be favorably impressed with the suit.

Again, reluctantly, Paul was forced to reply in the affirmative.

Then Allister, who was very much put out at the intelligence, explained why he had ventured to accost Paul. He had been informed, he said, that he, Paul, had had been paying attention to the young lady—and, in fact, that the gossips of the neighborhood had coupled their names together as being likely to one day enter the holy bonds of wedlock; and so believing that he, more than any one else, would be likely to take an interest in the matter, he had ventured to address him in regard to the subject.

As he had said he was the confidential man of business of Mr. Calderwood, but his attentions to the locksmith's daughter his employer had never revealed to him, and it was just by accident that he had learned of them. True, it was really none of his business, yet there were two or three reasons which impelled him to interfere. In the first place, he knew that Mr. Calderwood did not mean to act honestly with the girl, as he was already as good as engaged to an up-town belle, who was worth three or four millions of dollars in her own right; then he had seen Miss Eldorado, had been pleased with her fresh, young beauty, and the thought had come to him that it was a shame the thoughtless, cruel love of a passionate, heedless man should work her harm; and then, in early years he had been a locksmith himself, and the old pride in the trade prompted him to prevent harm from falling upon a member of the craft.

Mr. Calderwood, as he explained, was by no means a bad sort of a man; he was liberal and kindly-hearted to a great degree, but he had one terrible fault, and that was a disposition to fall in love with every pretty woman he came across; it was a sort of mania with him, and when he once became infatuated with a girl he would not scruple to use any means to win her.

"I am his servant—I have been with him a great number of years, and he has no truer or better friend in the world than I am," the man said, in conclusion; "this one fault is the only one I know him to possess, and I have made up my mind in the future to interfere with him in a quiet way when these strange infatuations take possession of him. They do not last long, nor do they occur often. You are on intimate terms with the lady, and now I give you a warning which will surely save her from becoming the prey of Mr. Calderwood. He will not marry her openly, but will seek to get her to consent to a secret union. If she does that, I care not how careful she is, it will be her ruin, for the secret marriage will be only a sham, and after a very brief time she will find herself deserted, for he soon tires of his victims."

Paul's blood boiled at the very idea, and in quiet but determined tones he said, if such a crime was committed, Calderwood's life would be in danger. Allister at once agreed with him that Calderwood deserved to die if he committed such a crime, but he told Paul that he relied upon him to warn the lady and so baffle the attempt.

And, as the affair progressed, Allister took care to see the young locksmith frequently, and so kept posted in regard to it.

Paul acted cunningly; he did not say anything to the father about Calderwood, but contrived to get into a conversation with the girl, and jokingly referring to Calderwood, declared that he expected she would run off with the

"blood" one of these days and get married without letting any one know anything about it. This fired the girl up at once, and with a glowing color in her face, she declared that when she was married the whole city should know of it, and have a chance to attend the ceremony, if they cared so to do.

This rousing of Eldorado's pride saved her from Calderwood, for in time he professed ardent love for her, and did his best to get her to consent to a secret marriage, but she was firm against the idea, and declared that he must ask her of her father and marry her in open church or not at all; and, with all a woman's obstinacy she held firm to this, and Calderwood, striving with a hundred persuasive arts to induce her to recede from this purpose, had no idea at all that, to his confidential man of business was he indebted for his ill-success.

This friendly act on the part of Allister had tended to draw himself and the young locksmith together, particularly as in his early youth Allister had worked at the trade. The two men became quite intimate and were very often together.

Since Calderwood's death Paul had believed there was some chance for him to win Eldorado, but the girl had been acting strangely and her treatment of Paul had not been calculated to encourage him.

And he was in quite a sad mood one night when he encountered Allister, and upon being rallied by the other upon his sadness, honestly confessed that he was afflicted by blue devils.

"I know the very thing to cure you!" Allister exclaimed; "come and join my club; it is an old trade organization imported from England years ago; none but good mechanics are allowed to join, and above all other trades we prize the locksmith's art. We call the club The Jolly Fellows of the Skeleton Keys. Will you come?"

Paul was in the mood for adventure and so consented.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CLUB.

It was a pleasant spring evening, and the two men walking down the Bowery beguiled the way with busy conversation. Allister was possessed of a vast amount of information, and was exerting himself to keep his companion amused and interested. He had a purpose in this, for he did not wish the young locksmith to take particular notice of which way their steps were wending, so that when the two turned from the main thoroughfare into a side street Paul never noticed which street it was, so interested was he in what his companion was saying.

"Our club is modeled on the old English fashion," Allister explained as he walked along; "we deal in 'rites,' and secret ceremonies, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, yes, I understand; that is usual, of course."

"Here we are!" remarked Allister, abruptly, pushing open the door of an old-fashioned two-storied brick house, and entering immediately; Paul followed, not even taking the trouble to cast a glance around him to see where he was. He looked upon the affair as a sort of a lark, never dreaming that there were any serious consequences attached to it.

After the young man passed through the portal, Allister closed the door and the two were in total darkness.

"Follow me," said the guide, "straight on, and then turn to the left when I tell you; there is a flight of stairs to be descended."

Paul did as he was bid; the stairs were descended, then the two turned to the right and proceeded along a narrow passage until their progress was impeded by a door.

Upon this Allister rapped, and a voice from within demanded:

"Who is there?"

"A brother and a friend."

"The brother is welcome, but what does the friend seek?" asked the voice.

"The friend desires to become a brother."

"Has he counted the cost, and does he know the ordeal that awaits him?"

The locksmith smiled, for this solemn jargon appeared but as child's play to him.

"What do you say, Paul?" Allister asked; "do you think your nerves are sufficiently strong to undergo the ordeal?"

The young man laughed aloud at this question.

"Why, what do you take me for, Allister?" he replied. "Do you think I am a child to be frightened by a shadow? I am not afraid of the ordeal, as you call it, whatever it may be."

"Well, I only wanted to give you fair warning, that is all, for when you are once in there is no retreating."

"Oh, go ahead; I am not at all afraid."

"He has counted the cost and declares that he does not fear!" Allister exclaimed, addressing the unseen sentinel who guarded the door.

"It is good! Clear heads, nimble fingers and bold hearts are ever welcome. The friend may enter that he may become a brother."

"Come on," said Allister.

There was no sound of the door opening; evidently it moved on well-oiled hinges, and the room within, access to which was gained through this door, was as dark as the passageway without.

The two moved forward ten or twelve steps, and then Allister motioned Paul to stop by laying his hand on his arm.

The door closed behind the two with a plainly perceptible "click," and to the experienced ears of the young locksmith it plainly revealed that there was a powerful piece of machinery attached to it.

"Remain where you are; be firm and fear not," Allister whispered in the ear of the young man; then he glided almost noiselessly away.

The injunction in regard to fear was entirely unnecessary, for Paul was as stout-hearted a lad as could be found in all New York.

For about a minute no sound broke the solemn stillness of the grave-yard-like vault in the center of which the young locksmith stood; then, abruptly, the tones of a voice fell upon the air—a peculiar voice with a strong touch of an Irish brogue to it which rendered it harsh and discordant, but Paul at once concluded that the brogue was assumed to disguise the tones and so prevent recognition; and, strangest of all, the voice seemed familiar to the young man. He was sure it was not the first time he had heard it. At first he suspected that it was Allister who spoke, because the voice seemed familiar, but, before the sentence was finished, he dismissed this idea, convinced that it had no foundation.

"Young man, you are about to pass through an ordeal of no ordinary nature," the voice declared, "and once the proceeding begins—once the Rubicon is crossed, there can be no retreat. Take time, then, now, to consider before it is too late. Will you go on, thus fairly warned, or will you reconsider your determination to become one of the Brothers of the Skeleton Keys, and depart?"

"I will go on," Paul answered, firmly, thinking that all this talk was but a trick to try his courage, and that, no doubt, all the jolly brothers of the club who had already passed through the ordeal, were enjoying the proceeding.

"For the last time you are solemnly warned—for the last time urged to retreat, if you are not fully prepared, for once you become one of us, you bind yourself to aid all your brothers to the utmost extent of your power, and they, in turn, will do the same for you," continued the voice.

The young man began to grow impatient; there was something too much of this.

"Proceed, sirs, if you please, proceed; you will not find me showing the white feather, no matter how fearful the ordeal," he said, confidently.

The words were boldly spoken, but the speaker had very little idea of what was before him.

"It is well; stout hearts are prized in our brotherhood," replied the mysterious voice. "Let there be light!"

And, at the command, the darkness faded slowly, and the place became illuminated.

Paul looked around him with considerable curiosity. He was standing in the center of a medium-sized apartment, square in shape, the walls hung with black cloth, as was also the ceiling, and there was no appearance of any means of entrance into the place.

The apartment was illuminated by means of the same device as that used in the underground meeting-place of the band of the Skeleton Keys, as described in a previous chapter.

The light streamed forth from a skull fixed to the ceiling in the center of the apartment.

The scene was exactly as the young locksmith had expected. Black-robed figures were seated in a half-circle, and in the center, on a slightly raised dais, with a desk before him, on which was a large book, the chief of the clubs sat.

From old, all secret societies have conducted their deliberation after this fashion, for the average man loves mystery, and the secret society, whether composed of patriots who plot the downfall of an empire, rascals, who league to defy the law, or simple, honest men, meeting for good-fellowship and social enjoyment, all rejoice in oaths, pass-words, secret gripes and solemn installations.

"You wish to join our society, Paul Delamater?" asked the man in the center of the half-circle, the chief of the band, and, beyond a doubt, the owner of the mysterious voice, which the locksmith was certain he had somewhere heard before.

"I do," the young man answered.

"And who answers for Paul Delamater?"

"I answer for him," responded one of the seated men, and the locksmith recognized the voice of Allister.

"With your life?"

"With my life, even as I do for myself!"

"Paul Delamater, brother No. 2 answers for you, and the reference is satisfactory; but before the oath is taken which binds you to us, and we to you, while life remains, it is best that you understand something of us," remarked the chief, in a very impressive manner. "We are no common society; on the contrary, we are

a band of brothers, not only in name, but in heart. We exact implicit obedience to our laws, and in return we give absolute protection. Mark well the oath, for it is no idle form of words. No. 3, administer it to the applicant."

One of the black-robed figures arose, a very tall man, and, as he spoke, his tone and manner strangely reminded one of a minister delivering a sermon.

"The oath of the Brothers of the Skeleton Keys," he began. "I humbly ask to become a brother, and I hereby swear to preserve inviolate all secrets intrusted to my care, to obey the orders given to me by the chief of the League, no matter what they may be, and in case of any brother falling into difficulties, even though he be placed under the ban of the law, I hereby swear to do all in my power to aid him, even to the extent of risking life and liberty in his behalf."

"You have heard the oath; will you swear to it, and place your name upon our muster-roll?" asked the chief, when the recital of the "creed" was ended.

"I will," replied Paul, who still looked upon the whole proceeding as a piece of pleasantry.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION.

"FROM this moment forth while life remains within your body the Skeleton Keys claim you as a brother," exclaimed the chief of the League.

"All hail, brother!" cried the rest in chorus.

"Be faithful to us and you shall prosper; obey the orders that are given you without question and all the rest of the brothers will aid you to the utmost of their power in any undertaking that you may attempt, and think not I speak lightly when I say that this modern world of ours has never known a better organized or a more powerful league than the one which you have just joined," the chief continued. "To the fullest extent of the motto we act upon the old-time legend, one for all and all for one. Like the German league, the Brothers of the Cord and Dagger, we can even bid defiance to the law, and laugh to scorn the power of its strong arm. Against the armor that we wear the sword of justice, hurtless, breaks; the cord of the gibbet, the prison cell of the felon, the steel bracelets of the detective, have no terror for our souls; we are the Brothers of the Skeleton Keys, the secret League that flourishes in the dark, and yet is strong enough to deal fearful blows in the open light of the sun to all who brave its power."

The young locksmith listened in amazement to this wild and wandering speech, not able to comprehend at all its meaning, for, why the presiding officer of a harmless social club should talk in such an extravagant way about braving the power of the law was something he could in no way understand.

The only conclusion he could come to was that, as the average man delights in mysteries, this social club boasted of defying the laws when none of the members had the slightest idea of breaking them.

"And now, brother, advance and affix your name to the roll-call," the chief commanded, in conclusion.

Paul did as he was ordered, and with a firm hand the young man inscribed the name of Paul Delamater upon the blank page of the book presented to him.

"Locksmith by trade?" said the chief, taking the pen from the hand of the young man, and arranging the book as though about to make an entry in it.

"Yes, sir."

"You count yourself a skillful workman I presume?"

"I was always reckoned so."

"That is what we want!" announced the masked chief, in a very significant manner. "Once in a while we come across a job in that line that requires the best workman that can be had to do justice to it."

Here was more mystery, and the young locksmith stared, for the speech was utterly incomprehensible to him.

"We will soon test your skill, rest assured of that, and if you are as cunning at your trade as report gives out, we shall esteem ourselves as being particularly fortunate in having acquired such a valuable brother."

The young man merely bowed; he was so mystified that he was really at a loss for words.

"And now I will explain to you the secret sign and grip, by means of which a brother can recognize a brother, anywhere, no matter how faithful the disguise."

More mystery, and again the locksmith stared.

"Now watch intently while I give the sign."

But that sign the young locksmith was not destined to see, just then, for a loud rap resounded through the apartment, and a stern, harsh voice cried:

"Open in the name of the law!"

"The police—the police!" exclaimed the brothers of the League in affrighted tones, and then, almost instantly, the place was plunged into utter darkness. There was the rush of many feet, succeeded by a deathlike silence.

In great amazement the young man stood, not knowing what to do under these strange circumstances.

What had the police to do with the members of the club, and why had they fled in such terror?

The answer to these questions was soon to come.

There was a heavy crash, like a door being forced from its hinges, which, in truth, was the case, and a squad of metropolitan police, armed with drawn clubs and revolvers, and some of them carrying bull's-eye lanterns, came rushing into the apartment.

They surrounded the young man immediately, and the officer who commanded the squad menacing Paul with a cocked and leveled revolver called upon him to surrender, threatening him with instant death if he attempted any resistance.

Paul, stupefied with amazement, hardly knew what to say, and the officer perceiving that the young man hadn't any idea of resisting at once proceeded to question him.

"Where is the rest of the gang? By what way did they escape? Is there a secret door here, somewhere?" And as he spoke the officer flashed the light of the lantern rapidly around the room.

The scrutiny was a fruitless one; the sable hangings completely concealed the walls, except at the side where the police had forced an entrance and had torn them down. There, there was a door in the stone cellar wall.

"Come, speak quickly!" the officer continued, finding that the young man did not reply.

"Tell us by what means your comrades succeeded in escaping so that we can follow them, and it will be a benefit to you."

"Upon my soul, sir, I don't know anything about it!" Paul exclaimed, earnestly.

"Oh, tell that to the marines!" the metropolitan cried, in disgust. "I know better; what is the use of your trying to pull the wool over my eyes? Come, you had better make a clean breast of it. It will be better for you in the long run, I tell you."

"Upon my word of honor, officer, I am speaking the truth!" the young man declared. "I am as ignorant as you are of this place and all that appertains to it. This is the first time I have been in it, and, strange as it may appear to you, I haven't a very clear idea how I got here, or where it is."

"Honor bright?" questioned the police officer, evidently impressed with the earnestness of the young locksmith.

"As I am a living man, I swear to you that I am speaking nothing but the truth."

"What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I came to become a member of the club—"

"That is it exactly—that is what we are after; the club! that is what we are 'gittin' at!" the officer interrupted. "But, I say, young man, ain't you kinder ashamed to own right up that you was going to join such a set of scallywags?"

Paul's face plainly showed the amazement that he felt at such a question.

"I was not aware that there was anything wrong about the club," he answered, slowly, greatly bewildered. "I really know very little about the matter. A friend invited me to join; he said that it was a sort of trade union and social club combined."

"A trade union!" the police captain exclaimed, contemptuously; "yes, a trade union of thieves, confidence-men, bank-robbers, burglars and such rascals generally."

"Upon my word, sir, I know nothing of the club excepting what I was told."

"Well, did they put you through? Had you joined when we interrupted the picnic?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, didn't they swear you to resist the officers of the law and to stick like a brick to a brother?"

"Yes; there was something of that sort in the oath, but I paid very little attention to it, for I did not dream that it had any particular meaning. I thought that it was only a mere matter of form without any particular meaning."

"You are too deuced innocent, young man," remarked the officer, with something of a sneer. "The men who compose this club—the Skeleton Keys—that's right, ain't it?"

Paul nodded.

"Well, sir, they are the biggest set of scoundrels in this country," the officer continued. "A good many of them are English transplants—men at the very top of the heap across the water, who came over the herring-pond because their own country got too hot to hold them; and if you are as innocent in the matter as you pretend, it is evident that they wanted to entangle you for some purpose of their own. What do you do, anyway?"

"I am a locksmith by trade."

"There it is; there is the hull thing in a nutshell!" the officer declared, emphatically. "You are reckoned a good workman, I suppose—good on neat, delicate jobs, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I have that reputation."

"And that is what they wanted you for. A good locksmith would be mighty valuable to such a band of cracksmen. You say that a friend introduced you?"

"Yes," answered Paul, reluctantly, for he scented mischief.

"Well, that is lucky, for that will give us a clew, and if we get hold of one in time we may be able to unearth the bull gang. What is the name of the man—where is he, what does he do and where kin we find him?"

These questions at once placed Paul in a fearful dilemma; noble and chivalric by nature, he shrunk from playing the part of an informer; besides, Allister might be innocent of the real character of the club; anyway, whether innocent or not, Paul could not bring himself to betray the man who had placed trust in him, so, after a few moments' hesitation he answered, evasively:

"I do not think I remember the name of the man; he was almost a stranger to me."

"Oh, gammon! That chicken won't fight! Spit it out or it will be the worse for you!"

"I cannot—it is impossible."

"Then, off to the stone jug you go, and, mind you, it will be five or ten years in prison if you refuse to answer."

"I cannot, no matter what the result may be," Paul replied, firmly.

CHAPTER XX.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

THE police-officer was evidently not prepared for this firm refusal, and he glared in the face of the young man for a moment in an angry way, as if he had not exactly made up his mind what to do.

"You refuse to answer, eh?" he muttered at last.

"Oh, I do not exactly refuse; I only say that I am unable to answer."

"That is all bosh! you know the man well enough!"

"Upon my word of honor I assure you that he is almost a stranger to me; a casual acquaintance, that is all."

"For the last time I will give you a chance to get out of the hobble before I put the bracelets on you. Now then, will you answer, yes, or no?"

"I repeat I am unable so to do," the young locksmith replied, quietly. He could not bring himself to betray Allister, although for aught that he might know, Allister was a ringleader of the band.

"Remember that it is your last chance," the police captain warned. "When you are locked up there won't be any chance to get out."

"I can only repeat what I have said."

"Hold out your wrists, then, till I snap the 'dabries' on; and mind, it is your own fault if you get two or three years in the stone jug for this."

"I am innocent—I have done no wrong, and I do not fear," Paul answered, firmly.

He extended his hands and the officer snapped the steel handcuffs upon the wrists. Paul's heart gave a great throb as the felon's manacles touched his flesh.

"It's your last chance; speak now, for it won't do you any good after you get before the judge," the captain cautioned. "He can't make terms with you, but I can. Will you tell me the name of the man so that I can lay him by the heels? Don't be a fool; he would peach on you in a minute if he got in a tight fix and saw a chance to squeeze out by so doing."

"I tell you that it is impossible for me to answer."

"All right, then."

The words were evidently spoken as a signal, for, in an instant, the apartment was flooded with a blaze of light, and from behind the black hangings of the walls, where they had evidently been concealed, came the cloaked and masked men, and at the same instant the policemen fell back from the young locksmith's side.

Paul, in bewilderment, looked around, not knowing what to make of this strange affair.

The truth, though, was soon made manifest to him.

"All hail to you, brother!" cried the chief of the band; "right gloriously have you passed through the ordeal. You are true to the core, and we thank Brother No. 2 for having introduced to us so good a man."

"I said that I would answer for him as for myself," said one of the masked men, and Paul recognized that it was Allister who spoke.

"What is the meaning of the strange scene through which I have passed? Is it all a farce?" Paul demanded, deadly pale, and a strange light shining in his eyes.

"An ordeal by means of which we put to the test the truth and constancy of any one who seeks to join our brotherhood," replied the chief, again assuming his place on the elevated chair behind the desk on which rested the roll-book of the "club." "You have passed through the ordeal most successfully. These worthy gentlemen in blue, the knights of the locust club, are also brothers."

"But is it true what has been said?" Paul demanded, impetuously, unable longer to conceal his indignation. "Is it true that you are a band of outlaws leagued together expressly to defy justice? Are you thieves and murderers?"

"Don't raise your voice quite so loud, young man," responded the masked chief, tartly.

"No one of us here is deaf, and there isn't the slightest need of shouting in any such fashion."

"I want the truth, and nothing but the truth!" the young locksmith exclaimed, hotly.

"Well, supposing that to a certain extent it is true—supposing we are banded together for mutual protection, and that, once in a while, we indulge in certain operations which the laws forbid, what then?"

"In Heaven's name, why was I brought here—what did you want with me? I am no such man; in all my life I have never offended against the law—have never been before a court charged with any offense; why did you select me for a tool, or was I brought here as a victim?" and the young man's eyes gleamed undauntedly.

"That, young man, is for you to decide," replied the chief, harshly. "In your own hands you hold your fate. We want you because you are an expert locksmith, and we have a job on hand for which we need just such a man as you are."

"You have made a great mistake!" the young man cried, sternly. "I will not have anything to do with you, nor with your rascally work. I am an honest man, and will not consent to be a party to any wrong-doing."

"Why did you come here, then? You were carefully warned before you took the oath that binds you to us—why did you go on?"

"Because I was entirely ignorant of what I was doing. I believed that you were a social club—a semi-trade organization—"

"And so we are, young man," the chief interrupted, "as social a gang, after you get acquainted with us, as can be scared up anywhere; and, as a trade organization, we beat the world. The way we stick to one another, until the hangman chokes us apart, is really wonderful. True, some of our little operations won't bear very close inspection, but we are true believers in agrarian principles; if we hear of any one that has any surplus wealth we 'go for him,' relieve him of it and divide it among ourselves with great impartiality. We want you; you have joined our band, and you must live up to your oath."

"I will not—by Heaven I will not!" the young locksmith asseverated, with flashing eyes.

"Don't be in a hurry; wait until you learn what it is that we want you to do," the chief counseled. "We have got the easiest and softest job in the world for you. We need an expert workman in your line, for we very often have little jobs, which it isn't safe to trust to an outsider. You won't run any risk at all, and you will be well paid."

"I refuse—I refuse a hundred times!" Paul exclaimed, vehemently.

"Take care, young man, don't be rash; to a certain extent we have placed ourselves in your power, and if you refuse to join us we may be compelled to adopt unpleasant measures to secure your silence," the chief remarked, in a very significant manner.

"You are not at all in my power; I know absolutely nothing whatever of your secrets; I do not even know where this place is situated, nor could I find it again if I tried. You already have sufficient proof, I should think, that I am to be trusted, and I give you my solemn oath that, if you let me go free, all the events of this night shall be forever blotted from my memory."

"We never take any chances, young man, when we can make a sure thing of it. You are a member of our brotherhood; you have taken the oath and by it you must abide; it is too late to retreat now. You must do our bidding!"

"I will not, even though death be the consequence of the refusal!" the young locksmith protested, unflinchingly.

"Death will be the consequence!" returned the chief, angrily, and as their leader spoke, the masked men began silently to gather around the young man, gazing the while at him with eyes inflamed with rage.

"Though I never leave this place alive, still, with my latest breath will I refuse. I will never consent to league myself with any band whose object it is to set at defiance the laws of my country."

"With your own lips you have pronounced your doom!" the masked leader exclaimed. "You have taken the oath of your own free will, and now that you refuse to abide by it, death is the penalty of the disobedience. South American, step forward!"

A tall figure advanced.

"You, too, are a novice," the chief continued, "who have yet to prove your worth by deeds; to you we delegate the punishment of this man; what is his doom?"

"Death," replied the other, in a deep voice; "but I cannot strike him with his hands confined. Have ze kindness to take off his handcuffs; give him a knife and you shall see a duel that shall cause your eyes to start."

This proposition suited well with the humor of the outlaws, and at once the chief assented.

"It is good; we need a raree show once in a while to wake us up. South American, can you kill him in your style?"

"Try me! Wiz one stroke I will cut t'e heart from t'e body!" the man replied, ferociously.

"Take off his bracelets, and then stand back and give them room!" the chief commanded.

The order was at once obeyed; the handcuffs were removed, and, dazed and bewildered by his strange position, the young locksmith stood free once more.

"Some of you give him a knife," said the chief.

"I have a pair," the South American hastened to say. This man was the same who had been introduced to the "club" by French Louis, and who now sought, after this strange fashion, to prove that he was worthy to belong to the Skeleton Keys. "A pair just alike and most wonderful knives, fit to let out ze lion's life. Here, my friend, take t'e weapon and defend your life if you can."

As he spoke, the South American advanced to Paul and tendered him the knife, the rest of the masked men falling back as he approached so as to give room for the coming encounter.

But, there was a great surprise in store for the brotherhood.

Hardly had Paul's fingers closed upon the knife, when, with lightning-like speed the South American wheeled around, a pair of cocked revolvers shining in his hands.

"Surrender!" he cried, in an entirely different voice from the one he had been using; "surrender or die!"

A gasp of horror came from the brotherhood. The South American was Joe Phenix, the detective!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ESCAPE.

THE appearance of the noted detective was a great surprise to the members of the secret band; no one had suspected that the South American was other than what he pretended. Not that they believed Phenix to be dead, for all were acquainted with the particulars of his marvelous escape from the terrible trap into which their artifice had plunged him.

It was not the first time the Skeleton Keys had imprisoned a victim in the underground apartment and then turned on the water which was to extinguish the life.

But this last time, when Phenix had been the victim, was one time too many; the cellar wall had given way, and the flood had rushed into the sewer hard by, and with the rushing tide Phenix had gone, borne onward like a straw upon the surface, and in time had reached the water side, after a most perilous passage.

The band of course had discovered what had happened when they came to look for the supposed dead body, and, although they hoped that Phenix had been drowned before the wall gave way, yet they were afraid that he had managed to escape, for, as more than one of them observed, the man had more lives than a cat.

The supposition was correct: Phenix had escaped—had assumed a new disguise, and then had successfully penetrated into their secret haunt!

Fortune, though, had somewhat favored the rascals, for, had not Phenix been obliged to show his hand, in order to save the young locksmith from the dreadful fate to which the outlaws had doomed him, there was very little doubt in their minds that, aided by the excellent disguise which he had assumed, and the confidence which he had won, he would most certainly have possessed himself of all the secrets of the band, or, at any rate, of enough of them to enable the strong arm of the law to lay hold of them.

And now the tug of war had come; revolver in hand, bold Joe Phenix challenged the masked and desperate outlaws!

But, the brothers of the Skeleton Keys were in no mood to measure strength in an open fight with the bold detective; they delighted only in a secret attack—or striking a blow at a time when the unprepared and unwarned victim could not possibly return it.

And now against Phenix's revolvers they opposed their favorite weapons, craft and cunning.

As if by magic the light was extinguished and the room plunged in utter darkness.

"Down on your face, flat!" whispered Phenix, immediately, pulling the young locksmith down with his strong right hand.

The detective expected that the gang would open fire on him as the band were all gathered on the further side of the apartment.

But, this was not the plan of the Skeleton Keys, for as dearly as any men in this world they prized their lives, and they feared to provoke the expert and courageous detective to an open conflict.

They had extinguished the light so that they might be able to retreat, leaving the locksmith and detective in possession of the field; then, too, they feared that Phenix had a body of police near at hand, ready to assist him upon call.

In this they were wrong, for the detective had not calculated upon an explosion coming so soon, and had not provided for it. He was utterly unprepared for an encounter with the gang, but of course they did not know this, and

so their abrupt retreat really relieved the pair from a great peril, for if the outlaws had attacked the two the issue of the conflict would almost certainly have been in favor of the brotherhood, for the odds were entirely too great.

Phenix's quick ears had caught the sound of the retreating footsteps.

"They have given leg-bail, and will not risk a fight," he whispered.

"But how are we to get out?" Paul asked, bewildered in the darkness.

"Keep hold of my hand and follow me," Phenix replied, rising to his feet. "I am like a cat and can see in the dark." And the detective really did possess this wonderful peculiarity. "Tread cautiously, though, for the passage is probably guarded by a pitfall or some other device, and if we are not on the look-out we may find the earth giving way beneath our feet."

With catlike caution Phenix proceeded, and well was it for the two that he was careful, for, just outside the door, through which the false policeman had come, right across the passageway a deep pit had been dug, a yard or so wide and ten or fifteen feet deep; this pit was covered by a door held in place by a stout catch to which a wire was attached operated from a room in the floor above, and it was so arranged that, when the catch was pulled back, the trap would yield under even a child's weight, and any one stepping upon it would instantly be precipitated into the dark pit beneath.

With his foot Phenix tried the trap-door and sprung the catch. The outlaw's first movement had been to pull the wire in the apartment above and place the trap in readiness to catch the two when they should essay to leave the cellar.

"It is as I thought," Phenix remarked, as he tried the trap with his foot and felt it yield under him. "I noticed as I came into the cellar when I walked over this that it was wood, and I instantly suspected then that the wood was a trap-door. These are clever rascals, and the man who gets the start of them must get up very early in the morning. Hold onto my hand until I discover the width of the trap."

This was soon done, and as it was only about a yard wide the two easily jumped over it.

"Now then we will have a clear course, for the door at the head of the stairs is bolted on this side; I noticed that when I came through the passage. It was designed to prevent people from getting in, not to prevent those already in from getting out."

This wonderful detective observed everything without apparently taking the trouble to make careful observation, but the habit had become a second nature to him, and even when not engaged in his business pursuits he was just as sure to note all the surroundings.

"Are you armed?" asked Phenix, after he unfastened the door and hesitating before he opened it.

"Only with the knife that you thrust into my hand," the other replied.

"That is a pity; I wish you had a revolver, for we may be attacked on the landing. It does not seem hardly possible to me that the rascals will allow us to walk quietly out without a struggle on their part to prevent it."

But, one thing the cute detective had not calculated upon, and that was, the terror of his reputation. Phenix's bold deeds had awed the evil-doers. Alone and single-handed Phenix inspired more fear than a squad of metropolitan officers.

And this fear of the rascals it was that rendered easy the escape of the two men.

The outlaws were sure that Phenix had a body of police outside the house ready to rush in at a moment's warning; and so, instead of trying to devise means to prevent the escape of the two, they only thought of getting away themselves, and in the speediest manner.

So the fugitives had a clear road before them, and without the slightest trouble they reached the street.

"Not much use of troubling myself to mark the place," Phenix observed, as he walked up the street, "for the odds are ten to one that the gang will never trouble the place again. This is the second hole that I have hunted them out of, but, as luck would have it, I have not been able to put salt on the tail of any of my birds yet."

Now that they were in the street, so that he could get a good look at his companion, the young locksmith surveyed the detective with a great deal of curiosity. He had often heard of the wonderful thief-taker, and many a time had perused the story of his exploits in the newspapers with no small amount of interest, and now to this shadow champion he was indebted for his life. With heartfelt gratitude he poured forth his thanks, but Phenix made light of the matter.

"Oh, it is nothing," he replied; "the only thing about it that troubles me is that I was forced to show my hand before I was ready to secure my point. I had succeeded splendidly in pulling the wool over the eyes of the rascals. There wasn't one of them who had the slightest suspicion that I was anything but what I appeared."

tended to be, a desperate, reckless foreigner, ready for any deed."

"I trust, sir, you fully understand that I had no suspicion of the real nature of the club which I was duped into joining?" Paul said, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that," the detective replied at once; "and now, if you have no objection, will you relate to me all the particulars of the affair—how you came to know anything about the Skeleton Keys at all, and how you were induced to join? I have got hold of a clew or two already, and perhaps you can give me another. Let no false idea of faith-keeping deter you from speaking freely, for upon my word I assure you you have been this night in the company of the biggest rascals this city holds within its limits."

And, being thus requested, the young man complied, and when he had finished his tale the detective cried aloud:

"Eureka! You have indeed given me a clew!"

And, strange to say, this clew, like another one upon which Phenix had followed, led straight to the death-bed of Ethelwold Calderwood!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INSURANCE QUESTION.

MARMADUKE CALDERWOOD had sojourned just one month in New York, and in that time he had succeeded in winning "golden opinions from all sorts of persons." Old Salamander was particularly impressed with him, and even the very particular and not easily-pleased Miss Salamander was heard to graciously remark that he was a very agreeable gentleman, indeed.

Possibly, it was the peculiar foreign air of Calderwood that impressed the girl; and then, too, he had traveled so much, and had such a vast and varied experience and could converse so delightfully, as all the ladies of his acquaintance united in saying.

In fact, the dead Calderwood was completely overshadowed by the live one, and the chances seemed very good that he would succeed in carrying off the heiress.

Not much progress had been made in settling up the affairs of the late Mr. Calderwood, though; there wasn't really much of anything left but the insurance money, and the different companies interested had called a meeting to discuss the matter, for all of them had been hit pretty hard, and they didn't relish paying if there was any possible way to get out of it.

Old Salamander was a director in two of the companies interested, and he had told Calderwood that he would do his best to help him in the matter, but, on the morning when the conference was held, he mistook the hour, and when he arrived at the place of meeting it was all over, so that he was not able to be as good as his word.

The decision arrived at by the insurance people was at once made known to Calderwood's lawyer; one and all declined to pay and invited a law-suit.

The lawyers were astounded, or at least they pretended that they were, whether such was the fact or not, and in great indignation they informed their client that, in their opinion, it was an outrage, and they would recommend a suit to be instituted immediately, as there wasn't the slightest doubt that the courts would see justice done, which was an extremely ambiguous phrase.

Calderwood expressed amazement—said the whole thing was a deuced bore, and that he really didn't see why there should be any trouble about the matter, and wound up by inquiring upon what grounds the companies declined paying the insurance money.

"Well, they allege fraud," the senior partner of the legal firm replied.

Calderwood stared.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I don't really understand that. What sort of fraud—in what way?"

"Ah, that is what they do not reveal," responded the legal gentleman, looking very wise.

"Of course you cannot in reason expect them to develop their plan of battle until we force them to do so. You see, my dear sir, the amount at stake is very large, they have received very little for it and they don't intend to pay if they can possibly get out of it. But, don't be uneasy about it, my dear Mr. Calderwood; I don't really see how they can get out of it; in fact, as the matter stands now, I do not see that their case has got a leg to stand on. There isn't much doubt that we shall win, but, of course, they will make a tough fight; that is to be expected."

"Oh, yes, the deuced beggars! we must make it hot for them, as you say in America, here," and then Mr. Calderwood withdrew.

His bearing, which had been light and careless in the lawyer's office, displaying the true cool indifference, supposed to be the natural demeanor of the Anglo-Saxon, changed considerably after the door closed behind him. An anxious look came over his face, and a half-smothered oath escaped from his lips.

"It is not going to be smooth sailing," he muttered. "We are going to have a contest, and that means that time will be wasted; the suit may consume a year—perhaps more, if they have anything to go on—but, have they? That is what I must look after, at once. No time must be lost. It must be they have something tangible to work on, or they would not go to the expense of a suit, unless they are trying a bluff game, thinking to force us to a compromise."

By this time Calderwood had descended to the next landing, and a tall, thin old man, with straggling, iron-gray hair, and a scrubby beard of the same hue, shabbily dressed, accosted him.

"Mr. Calderwood, I believe!" he exclaimed, with a profound bow; he had evidently been on the look-out for the Englishman.

Calderwood favored the old man with a quiet glance, and it was plain that the Englishman, for all his sleepy ways, could be as keen as a hawk upon occasion.

The old fellow was not prepossessing in appearance, and Calderwood could hardly be blamed for regarding him with distrust.

"That is my name," he said, stiffly.

"Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood," the other continued, as if determined to be sure of his man.

"Yes, sir."

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing myself," and the stranger made an extremely humble bow. "My name is Jones; O. B. Jones—Obadiah Benjamin Jones—and I am an humble member of the legal profession."

Calderwood instantly came to the conclusion that he was not only an humble member of the bar, but a rather disreputable one, also.

"My name is not unknown to fame," the stranger continued, "in a certain sort of way, although I suppose it is more than probable that you have never heard of me."

Calderwood admitted that he never had had that pleasure.

"Famous is not perhaps the exact word," Mr. Jones remarked, "if we give due weight to the meaning of words; notorious would fit better. In the parlance of the city I am a shyster, a pettifogger, a man who fishes his bread out of very dirty waters."

Calderwood drew himself up haughtily as the speaker made this remarkable admission, which was candid if not complimentary. With his ferret-like eyes the man saw which way the wind had set.

"Have patience, my dear sir!" he hastened to exclaim. "As the poet beautifully remarks, 'Strike but hear me!' I am aware that my appearance is against me; I am quite certain that my admission in regard to my professional standing is not calculated to impress a stranger favorably. I am but as dirt; I know it; and, knowing it, am I therefore strong. I am a worker in the dark, one who works in rubbish sometimes not over clean, but such men are very necessary in this world sometimes. My learned brothers in the law up-stairs, who would hardly condescend to recognize me if they met me on the street, often have to employ just such agents as I am. I have heard, just by accident, you know, of your insurance case, and I have an idea that in the matter I can do you much more good than my esteemed brothers up-stairs. If you are going in to make a fight for the insurance money you will have to use just such weapons as I wield, so I thought I would come and speak to you in person, for I believe always in dealing with principals."

"My dear sir, I trust you will excuse me if I fail to see how you will be able to benefit me in the least," Calderwood replied. "My case, as far as I can see, is perfectly clear, and I do not comprehend how a man of your stamp will be able to render me any service."

"Allow me to explain," the other rejoined, with a bow which was servile in the extreme. "It is quite plain to me that you are not as well posted in this affair as you ought to be. By accident I happen to be acquainted with a few particulars which may be of service to you. You know that the insurance companies have determined not to pay the moneys due on account of the death of your brother, Ethelwold Calderwood?"

The Englishman, cautious as he was, did not see that he would commit himself materially by answering the question, and so he did so, in the affirmative.

"And they allege fraud as an excuse for not paying?"

"I believe so," Calderwood replied.

"Now I will tell you something that you do not know, and which your lawyers are not likely to find out until the case comes to trial. The grave of your brother has been opened and the body taken out, and the woman who has been the main-spring in all this affair, Helen Lodge, swears that the body is not the body of Ethelwold Calderwood."

Despite the perfect self-control which the Englishman had over himself and his wonderful strength of nerve, he could not help turning pale and a sudden cruel, hard light shone in his eyes. His hands, too, were clenched firmly until the nails almost pierced the flesh.

The news was a staggerer, and for a few mo-

ments Calderwood could hardly believe that it was true, yet the man seemed to know what he was talking about.

Perceiving the doubt, the lawyer proceeded: "Stirred up by this woman the insurance companies have employed Phenix, the noted detective, and he is hard at work looking up proof."

"Let us go to your office and talk it over," Calderwood said.

The Englishman realized that the shyster's services would be valuable.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALLISTER SPEAKS.

MISS LODGE had remained at the country house at the Highlands, waiting the arrival of Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood, but after that gentleman made his appearance in the New World, he had not condescended to come near Calderwood Hall.

The lady waited until her patience was exhausted, and then she approached Allister on the subject, but Allister was extremely non-committal and professed utter ignorance in regard to it.

Mr. Calderwood had landed, he said, and he presumed that after he had recovered from the effects of the journey he would visit Calderwood Hall.

But days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into a month, yet Marmaduke Calderwood came not.

Miss Lodge grew daily more and more impatient, and at last, after a visit to New York, Allister returned with a message from the brother of the deceased; his ultimatum, it might justly be termed.

Calderwood Hall, with all its belongings, furniture, etc., had passed into the possession of the moneyed corporation who held an over-due mortgage upon the premises, an amicable arrangement having been effected; and the inmates were allowed one week to remove their private effects. Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood would not come to Calderwood Hall, as he felt that it would be painful for him to visit the spot where his once-loved brother had departed this life. Neither did he desire to see Miss Lodge; he had been made acquainted with the peculiar claims which she had set up, but he trusted that she had too much sense to allow herself to be persuaded by any one to follow a will-o'-the-wisp—a phantom chase which could only come to naught. If she chose to accept the money left to her by the will of the deceased, the cash was ready at any time.

The lady flew at once into a rage, for she saw that the conspirators, whoever they were, believing that they had made all safe, were disposed to drive her to the wall.

"I will not accept a single penny!" she cried, indignantly. "I will have what is mine by right or nothing at all!"

"Of course, Miss Lodge, it is no business of mine at all, but will you permit me to reason with you a little in regard to the matter?" Allister asked, in an extremely friendly sort of way.

Now the lady believed that Allister was the very head and front of the conspiracy; in fact, she held him entirely accountable for the untimely taking off of Ethelwold Calderwood, and now that the brother, Marmaduke, had declined to see her, she began to believe it was entirely owing to the schemes of Allister.

If the brother was not a party to the crime, but the innocent dupe of the confidential man of business, of course it was to Allister's interest to keep her from having an interview with Marmaduke, for fear she might excite his suspicions. If, on the contrary, the brother was a confidant and knew all about the mysterious crime, it was natural he should shrink from a meeting with her, knowing that she suspected there had been foul play.

The woman felt that she was engaged in a most difficult task; so far she had not succeeded in gaining a single point; every trick had been scored against her, and had it not been that she had gained the help of the noted detective, Phenix, and through him the aid of the life insurance companies, she most surely would have despaired. As it was there was very little in the case to encourage her. Her only game was to watch and wait, and trust to circumstances to bring better fortune; so, adopting the Fabian policy, she temporized.

"I am not so utterly hard-headed and impracticable as you think me," she remarked, quietly, "and I am sure I am not above taking good advice; so I will listen to anything you have to say."

Allister surveyed her intently while she was delivering this speech, as if expecting to read her mind in her face, but, shrewd as he was, he was not capable of doing this; her face was a mask that betrayed nothing.

"I am glad to see you take a sensible view of the matter," he observed, approvingly, "and I am quite satisfied that, if you will reflect calmly and deliberately over the matter, you will come to the conclusion that it is much wiser for you to take the money left by the terms of the will rather than attempt to get the somewhat

uncertain sum which the law would allow you if you should succeed in proving that you are the legal widow of the late Mr. Calderwood."

"If I understand the situation correctly, Mr. Calderwood died a poor man."

"Yes, he left just about enough to pay his debts, nothing more."

"And this money that is bequeathed to me under the will," the lady asked—"you say that that will be paid to me if I do not make opposition?"

"Most certainly."

"But, if Mr. Calderwood did not leave any estate, where is the money to come from?"

"Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood will pay it out of his own pocket in order to carry out the wishes of his deceased brother."

"And trust to the life insurance money to get it back," Miss Lodega observed, suggestively.

"Yes, I believe there is some life insurance money."

"You know there is," the lady replied, quickly. "You must not attempt to deceive me, for I have taken pains to inform myself, fully. If I could succeed in making good my claim, I could very easily break the will."

"Perhaps, but these legal matters are so terribly uncertain," Allister remarked, dryly.

"Will you permit me to inquire if you really and honestly think you could make good the claim you have advanced?"

"That I am the legal wife of the late Ethelwold Calderwood?"

"Yes."

"I do not know; as you have just observed, the law is so terribly uncertain."

"You are evasive," Allister continued, with a quiet smile. "I feel sure you have not been idle all this month. I know you were disposed to make a fight for your rights, and I have no doubt, whatever, that you have consulted counsel and have ascertained what sort of a chance you have."

Despite her self-control, a bitter look swept over the face of the woman; she nothing doubted that the speaker knew some of the measures she had taken, for it was not likely that either the doctor or lawyer would be apt to keep secret in regard to the insane idea, as they evidently considered it, which had taken possession of her.

Allister this time was able to read what was passing in the woman's mind, and hastened to explain.

"I speak as I have done," he said, "for during the past month I have not been idle, and I have discovered some facts about Mr. Calderwood which really astound me. I thought I knew all his business, both public and private, but, on the contrary, I find that quite a number of things were concealed from me. Miss Lodega, I will say frankly to you that, when you told me you had been secretly married to Mr. Calderwood, I did not believe your story, but now that I know certain things, which then I had no idea of at all, I see no reason to doubt the truth of it."

"Ah," and a gleam of triumph swept rapidly over her face; "you believe, then, that I was legally married to Mr. Calderwood?"

"No, madam, I do not believe that," he replied, firmly. "I believe that you have been cruelly deceived—deceived by the man you loved and trusted—I believe that Mr. Calderwood tricked you with a mock marriage, as he tried to trick another woman, whose name I will give you so that you can go and see her and ascertain whether I am speaking the truth or not, and at the very time when he was betraying you with a mock ceremony—at the very time when he was attempting to lure this other girl into a secret marriage, which would have been a mockery, of course, he was as good as engaged to a noted New York belle, a society queen, an heiress in her own right. You shall have her name, too, so that you can, with very little trouble, find out whether I am speaking the truth or not. Now, look at the case in the right light; put the question to yourself, which one of the three women to whom, at the same time, Calderwood was paying his addresses, would he be most apt to keep faith with—you, whom he married secretly, the locksmith's daughter, whom he tried his best to persuade into a secret marriage, or this wealthy society belle whom, of course, he would have been obliged to marry openly, before all the world?"

Miss Lodega became deadly pale.

"If this statement is true, Ethelwold Calderwood was mad!" she exclaimed, hoarsely.

"You are right; for the time he was mad; you infatuated him and he determined to possess you, no matter how great the cost; Miss Eldorado Wayland, the locksmith's daughter, also infatuated him, and he was determined to have her, but she would not listen to the idea of a secret union, and so escaped. The rich girl, too, had ensnared him, and her wealth was necessary to ward off impending ruin."

"In Heaven's name, then, did Mr. Calderwood commit suicide in order to escape from the snare in which he had so recklessly entangled himself?" Miss Lodega demanded, excitedly.

"The doctors said that he died a natural death,

and they should know; but here are the addresses of the two girls; seek them and satisfy your mind."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

MISS LODEGA received the addresses, and so the interview terminated.

The woman's mind was in a strange whirl; the deeper she penetrated into this dark affair the more mysterious it became. Acute as was her mind and great as the knowledge of the world which she possessed, yet she was utterly at fault. The new-comer, Marmaduke Calderwood, did not intend to see her. What was the motive? There was no reason why he should avoid her as far as she knew. But he or Allister, or the conspirators, whoever they were, had made up their minds that she should not remain at Calderwood Hall, and so they had passed the property out of their hands.

But, who was the prime mover in this? Was it Calderwood himself? All circumstances pointed to him, for he was the man who was deriving benefit from the death of Ethelwold. Had he planned the affair, and from across the sea directed it with Allister's aid? Horrible thought! Or, had the late master of Calderwood Hall been a black-hearted villain, and coolly and deliberately deceived her by a mock marriage?

She was groping idly in the dark, and the longer she pondered over the matter, the more bewildered she became.

She must do something, and that speedily. She had done everything that could be done; and there was no need of her lingering longer at the scene of the tragedy. So Miss Lodega, making a virtue of necessity, packed up her things and departed, saying to Allister that she would reflect upon what he had said, and in a few days would communicate to him her decision, whether it would be peace or war.

In New York the lady went to the boarding-house on one of the up-town cross-streets where she had resided before she had entered Calderwood's service; then having made arrangements in regard to a room she proceeded to ascertain whether Allister had spoken truth or falsehood in regard to the two girls and Calderwood.

To the locksmith's house she went first. Eldorado was at home, and answered the door-bell in person.

Miss Lodega gazed with jealous eyes upon the blooming charms of the fresh and fair young girl, and in her heart of hearts she could not help acknowledging that she was indeed likely to prove a dangerous rival to almost any woman.

The locksmith's daughter was extremely astonished when the strange lady announced that she had important business with her and begged the favor of a private interview, which Eldorado granted at once, although completely in the dark in regard to what the other had to say.

Miss Lodega had recognized the girl, for it was not the first time she had seen her. She was one of the two veiled women who had attended the funeral rites of Calderwood in the pretty country cemetery! The jealous eyes of the woman recognized the figure although the face had been concealed.

Seated in the locksmith's cosy parlor Miss Lodega proceeded immediately to the business upon which she came.

"You will I trust pardon me if I speak upon a tender and a delicate subject," she began, "and I trust you will believe me when I say it is of vital importance to me, or else I should not presume to intrude upon you."

Eldorado opened her eyes widely and surveyed her visitor with great curiosity.

Miss Lodega continued: "If I have been rightly informed, you were well acquainted with the late Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood."

The girl's face expressed her amazement. "It is the truth, is it not? you were intimately acquainted with Mr. Calderwood?"

"Yes, I was; did you know him?" Eldorado answered.

"Very well indeed; I was married to him only a few days before he died."

The girl's astonishment was too great for expression in words.

"I was secretly married to him," Miss Lodega continued, laying a strong emphasis upon the word secretly.

"You married to Mr. Calderwood?" Eldorado reiterated at last.

"Yes, and that is the reason why I came to see you. I have been told that at the very time Mr. Calderwood was paying the most devoted attention to me—doing all in his power to induce me to consent to a secret marriage, he was also paying his addresses to you and striving to get you to agree to a secret marriage."

Eldorado reflected for a few moments before she replied. The strange lady evidently was deeply in earnest, and if her story was true, as no doubt it was, she, Eldorado, felt that it was her duty to tell all she knew, although her tale would blacken terribly the memory of the dead man.

"It is the truth, madam; Mr. Calderwood

was a most ardent and persistent suitor, and I will own frankly to you that I was very much impressed with his attentions," the girl said, "and if he had come openly and asked me of my father I have no doubt I would have consented, but my pride was piqued at the idea of a secret marriage, and I would not listen to the idea for a moment, although I never dreamed there was any harm in it."

"Miss Wayland, you may thank the kind angels who watched over you that you were saved from a most terrible doom!" Miss Lodega exclaimed, solemnly. "I, wiser than you—a woman not ignorant of the world, fell into the trap. I loved the man and yielded to his wish for a secret marriage, and now that he is dead I find myself utterly unable to prove that any such thing took place. The marriage certificate which I saw filled out with my own eyes and which I have treasured as carefully as a miser does his gold is now utterly blank, no sign upon its surface that a pen has ever made a scratch there. The minister who united us and whose address I carefully held in my remembrance has disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up, and now that the man who betrayed my trust is dead and gone, I find that at that very time when he was completing my ruin, he was also attempting yours, and was engaged, too, to be married to a noted society lady."

Again Eldorado's eyes dilated. Could it all be possible? The accents of truth dwelt in the strange lady's voice; it must be so!

"I could not believe it!" Miss Lodega declared. "I fought against the truth with all my might. I could not think that this man, whom I so thoroughly trusted, had deceived me, but now when I learn from you that Ethelwold Calderwood was trying to induce you to consent to a secret marriage, at the very time he was wedding me—also that he had plighted faith with this wealthy up-town girl, it is useless to hold out longer although it is bitter indeed to wake to the discovery that I have been made this man's dupe and plaything."

"Madam, do you think Mr. Calderwood really is dead?" Eldorado asked, suddenly, a peculiar grave expression upon her face.

"Yes, of course," the other replied, amazed at the question.

"Do you believe in ghosts then?"

"Indeed I do not; but, why do you ask such a question?"

"Because last night I think I saw Mr. Calderwood alive!" was Eldorado's startling answer.

"It is impossible!"

"I am sure of it!" the girl persisted, firmly, "as sure as I can be of anything in this world. I was coming down the avenue just at dusk and the street lights were not yet lit. A man passed me in company with two others, going up-town; he did not happen to notice me for he was busy in conversation with one of his companions, but I got a clear and distinct view of his face; he was dressed roughly, and was very much changed indeed in his appearance, as if he had tried to disguise himself, but I recognized him at once; it was Ethelwold Calderwood."

"Oh, child, it is not possible!" Miss Lodega exclaimed; "you have been deceived by some strong resemblance. He has a brother here now, lately come from England; perhaps he may resemble Mr. Calderwood and that it was the brother whom you saw. It could not be Mr. Calderwood, for, with my own eyes I saw him lying dead in his coffin."

"If Mr. Calderwood is dead, then it was Mr. Calderwood's ghost, for it was Ethelwold Calderwood whom I saw," the girl still persisted, with unmoved confidence.

The other did not attempt to reason her out of this fantasy, perceiving that she was in dead earnest, and after a few more unimportant words took her departure.

The Calderwood mystery was growing more and more dark.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE OTHER WOMAN.

FOR courage and perseverance Helen Lodega was one woman of ten thousand. Having made up her mind to penetrate to the very heart of this dread mystery, if such a thing was possible, she became a literal sleuth on the trail.

True, so far her efforts had resulted in nothing. She had found Allister's information correct, and yet could not bring herself to believe that the man meant any good to her. He had a motive, of course, he had not volunteered to aid her through any friendly feeling for her; so, what was that motive? Was his betrayal of the secrets of his dead master designed to turn her from the course which she had determined upon pursuing? It seemed likely.

If there was not some fiendish trickery in all she had heard, some devil's plot by means of which the reputation of the dead man was to be blackened, Ethelwold Calderwood was a villain, fit only to perish in the most ignominious manner.

He had deceived and betrayed her; he had attempted to deceive and ruin the pretty Eldorado. The visionary idea about meeting the

dead man alive and well, though disguised, came from a young and overheated imagination, and was not to be credited, of course; so Miss Lodega dismissed it from consideration; but she would pursue the trail to the bitter end, adding proof upon proof of the dead man's villainy.

So, from the house of the locksmith the lady went at once to the residence of the society belle; but it was not an easy matter to gain speech with Miss Hero Salamander. It was an unfashionable hour for calling, and the servant who came to the door said immediately that Miss Salamander was "not at home."

Miss Lodega of course understood that this was a polite fiction, an easy way of denying herself to callers, but she had come prepared for this very refusal.

She thrust a crumpled-up bill into the man's hand, and in her most persuasive tones said:

"I come upon very important business, and may not be able to come again; I most particularly require to see Miss Hero *this morning*, and if you will have the kindness to slightly overstep your orders and go to her and say that I come upon business connected with the late Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood, I am sure she will see me."

The man grinned and nodded his head. He knew the gentleman well enough whom he had often admitted into the Salamander mansion.

"I will do what I can for you, miss, and I shouldn't be surprised if she does see you, for she thought a great deal of Mr. Calderwood—as we all did, for that matter, in the house, for he was a mighty pleasant gentleman."

The man departed leaving the lady a prey to the worst of fears.

Calderwood evidently was well known in the house—had been a frequent and a welcome visitor. Allister's information was fated to come true again!

The servant soon returned and invited Miss Lodega to walk into the parlor. Miss Salamander's curiosity being aroused she had determined to see the visitor, and soon the queenly girl, so superb in her rich young beauty, though unaided by the artifice of dress or decoration, entered the room.

Helen Lodega was amazed, for she was not prepared to see any such gorgeous creature. Eldorado Wayland, the locksmith's daughter, was a pretty girl enough, after a fashion, but was not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath as this splendid woman. Eldorado was pretty—this girl was magnificent, and a bitter feeling came up in the caller's heart as she thought how much she suffered in comparison with either of these two beauties; but she had won the man! Her tact and cunning, womanly lures and artifice, had triumphed over both youth, freshness and beauty; it had proved to be but a barren victory, though, and the golden apple which, goddess-like, she had won from the other Graces had turned to ashes in her mouth.

Miss Salamander sharply surveyed her visitor. The mysterious message in regard to the dead Mr. Calderwood demanded explanation, particularly as she and the brother of that gentleman were then upon such intimate terms that the gossips of the avenue broadly hinted that Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood would succeed to the prize which Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood had so nearly won when fell Death with his mighty shears nipped his thread of life in twain.

"I come upon a very peculiar errand, Miss Salamander," the visitor began, "and I trust you will pardon me if I question you in regard to a matter which, at the first glance, is apparently none of my business."

Miss Salamander elevated her beautiful eyebrows in mute amazement at this strange introduction, and then, sinking gracefully into an easy-chair, signified with a nod of her queenly head for her visitor to go on.

"I called to inquire about Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood: you were intimately acquainted with him, I believe?"

Again Miss Salamander nodded; she couldn't guess what was coming, and so wisely held her peace, until her visitor should explain herself more fully.

"Pardon the question—I know that it seems like prying into your personal and private affairs, but was Mr. Calderwood a suitor for your hand?"

Miss Salamander hesitated for a moment before she attempted to answer. It was a delicate question, but the man was dead and gone, so, really, what did it matter?

"He was a suitor," she said, frankly.

"And—pardon the impudence of the question—a favored one?"

Again Miss Hero hesitated and elevated her eyebrows in doubt; it was an extremely personal query, but, after all, what particular harm was there in it?

"I presume people thought he was a favored one," she replied, "and I am willing to confess that I liked him as well as I did any of the rest of my admirers."

"And if he had lived, you might have married him?"

"Oh yes, I might; I won't say that I wouldn't or that I would; it is one of those sort of

things that are so extremely uncertain," Miss Salamander answered, in the indifferent manner so common to her, and which had given rise to the saying among her associates that her heart and her father's conscience were about of a "bigness."

"My information then was correct," Miss Lodega observed, rising to her feet, her face quite pale and her eyes flashing. "I am very much obliged to you for your trouble in answering my apparently impertinent questions."

"But stay!" exclaimed the young lady, also rising; "you have not satisfied my curiosity at all. Why are you so anxious to know about the late Mr. Calderwood's relations with me?"

"Why? Because at the very time he was wooing you, just before his death, only a week or so, he induced me to consent to a secret marriage with him. I was weak, and yielded; and now that he is dead all traces of that marriage have vanished as completely as though such a union had never taken place. I believed I was legally and lawfully his wife, and I woke from my dream to find that I have absolutely no proof of it, and am forced to believe that I was tricked and wronged by this man whom I trusted with my whole heart. I woke to the knowledge that Ethelwold Calderwood was a villain. When he died I believed that he was a martyr, and swore to avenge his death. I thank you, miss, for your kindness." And then the lady withdrew, leaving Miss Salamander the prey of the most profound amazement.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GUESSING AT THE TRUTH.

AFTER leaving the Salamander mansion, Miss Lodega went at once to the detective's office.

The lady was destined to be fortunate to-day, for the detective was in the private office, and the clerk without, who had received his orders, at once admitted her to the presence of his chief.

Phenix was busily engaged in writing when the visitor was ushered into the room, and as he laid down the pen and surveyed Miss Lodega, he perceived, from the expression upon her face, that she had important tidings to communicate.

"Deny me to every one until I am through with this lady," he said to the clerk, who bowed and withdrew, and Miss Lodega was left alone with the great detective.

"Well?" Phenix asked, laconically.

Understanding that this was a signal for her to go on, with terse brevity the lady gave a full account of what had transpired, commencing with the information received from Allister; and following with an account of her visits to the two girls so widely different in their appearances and their social positions, and yet so closely connected with the dead Mr. Calderwood.

One thing, however, she neglected to mention—the statement of the locksmith's daughter that she had seen the dead man alive and well. The idea to her was so absurd, that Miss Lodega did not think it worthy of mention.

She was not the first person in the world who has grasped at the shadow and disdained the substance.

Her statement put the detective in possession of no new facts; what she related was already known to him. His chance meeting with the young locksmith, Paul Delamater, had informed him of Calderwood's pursuit of the pretty Eldorado and of the gorgeous Miss Salamander.

Phenix was silent for a few moments after Miss Lodega had finished her recital, evidently deep in thought. In truth it was a very perplexing case.

"I confess, Miss Lodega, that I am sorely puzzled in this matter," he said at last. "The trails we have struck so far seem to be blind ones; they open fair enough and seem likely at first to lead to something, but, after a while, like the road renowned in Western story, they run up a tree and stop. I have handled some difficult matters in my time, but this case beats them all. Now, then, what is your idea of this matter—your impression?"

"I hardly know," the woman answered.

The detective spread the sheets of letter paper upon which he had been scribbling out before him on the desk, something after the fashion of a gambler displaying a hand of cards.

"I have been amusing myself with setting down various theories in regard to this case," Phenix remarked; "wild guesses some of them perhaps, with very little foundation to sustain them. We will start with No. 1; this, by the way, may be said to be your theory, and the life-insurance money plays a very prominent part in all of them. Calderwood, being of an easy, genial disposition, and almost a stranger in the country, without any relatives here, is fixed upon by a band of daring rascals as the proper man for a victim. He is induced to insure his life for a large sum, and then is murdered by some potent drug, so skillfully administered as to deceive even the experienced eyes of the attending doctors, who freely ascribe the death to natural causes. Now, if this sup-

position is correct, it implicates John Allister, who was Calderwood's confidential man of business, and also this brother from across the sea, Marmaduke Calderwood, who is the heir of the dead man by the terms of the will. This Marmaduke and Allister must be in league, for the second must have perpetrated the crime by which the first is to profit, for as Marmaduke was not in the country at the time he could not possibly have had a hand in the crime. Now against this theory are these facts: first, the doctors, all eminent and skillful men, declare that Calderwood died a natural death, and that there is no doubt whatever in regard to the manner of the death; second, that there is no drug known to medical science which could produce death under such conditions without leaving visible traces to an experienced medical eye. Now then theory No. 2: Calderwood was a rascal and a rogue; he was terribly embarrassed—was living in a style which he could by no means afford, and which it was impossible for him to keep up much longer, he foresaw that a crash was coming, yet in a moment of passion he yielded to his wishes and married you; the moment he did that he understood of course that he could not hope to retrieve his fortunes by marrying Miss Salamander, and yet from the peculiar precautions he took in wedding you to fix everything so that it would be impossible for you to prove that any such ceremony ever took place, it really looks as if he intended to have you secretly, and Miss Salamander, or anybody else that he fancied, openly; but, for some reason, he was disheartened, and thinking that he could not possibly escape from the embarrassments that surrounded him, committed suicide. The chief thing against this theory is the same as against No. 1; that is, it would be impossible for him to accomplish his death in such a manner without leaving traces that must surely be discovered at once by the medical men in attendance. Theory No. 3: That the death was due to natural causes alone, and that there was neither foul play nor suicide in the matter. The doctor's opinion would seem to support this theory in the most complete manner, but, against it are certain mysterious things: First, the successful accomplishment of the purpose to get you away from the house. You were supposed to be in the South when the death took place. If all was fair and above board, why was your absence desired, as it evidently was, and successfully accomplished, too? Second, the tampering with the grave and the substitution of the body of the unknown man there in the place of Calderwood's remains. You are quite sure, by the way, that the body we exhumed was not the body of Calderwood? and the detective fixed his keen eyes earnestly on the lady's face as he put the question.

"Yes, I am sure of it," she replied, in the most decided manner. "I know there cannot be any mistake about it. The body closely resembled Calderwood's remains, and would probably have deceived nine people out of ten who were well acquainted with him, but it is impossible to deceive my eyes."

"You must make allowance, you know, for death producing great changes in the appearance of the body."

"I know all that, but I would be willing to swear under oath that it was not Mr. Calderwood's remains."

"The mutilation of the face, apparently the result of accident, but no doubt designedly done, would seem to indicate that you are correct in your statement."

"Oh, I am sure of it!" she exclaimed. "But, in the meantime, may not the grave be tampered with again?"

"It is watched, night and day, by my men," Phenix answered. "I wish they would try it on, for if I could get hold of the men, I should have a clew. Well, you see, these things seem to disprove theory No. 3. Now we come to No. 4, a most wild and visionary one, and yet, the true theory, I am tempted to believe; and that is, that Calderwood is *not* dead, and did not die at all; that his supposed death was only part of a clever scheme to rob the insurance companies out of the large sums of money which they would be obliged to pay in the event of his death. It is no new idea, you know, for a man to insure his life for a large sum, and then manage to make it appear that he had died, by accident, generally, while, in some safe hiding-place, disguised, he waited for his family to get the money. This scheme has been tried and detected twenty times in this country within the last twenty years; how many times it has succeeded, no man knows."

Miss Lodega was a very attentive listener, now, although, from the expression upon her face, it was plain that she was not a convert to the theory.

"He pretended to be sick—called in the doctors, and allowed them to prescribe for him," the detective continued; "then he became worse; by a skillful ruse the dead body was substituted for him, and it was given out that he was dead."

"Oh, no; I saw him dead, with my own eyes!" the lady interrupted, "not twenty minutes after the breath of life had passed from the body."

"Some cunning trick, my dear madam, which was clever enough to deceive even your eyes!" Phenix insisted. "I am sure, wild and visionary as the theory is, that I am on the right track this time. I am satisfied that Ethelwold Calderwood is alive and well to-day, and, from some secure retreat, is engineering these proceedings to get the big sum of money which the insurance companies are stuck with, if they do not succeed in exposing the fraud."

Miss Lodega shook her head; she could not bring herself to believe in the idea; then, all of a sudden, there flashed across her mind the wild declaration of the pretty Eldorado.

The locksmith's daughter believed that she had seen Calderwood alive, and disguised!

This information which she had considered too trivial to be worth mentioning, she now imparted to Phenix.

As the detective listened he shut his strong teeth together, and a keen, hawk-like light shone in his eyes.

"It is as I thought!" he averred, when the lady had finished; "the last theory is the true one: Ethelwold Calderwood is alive, and I will have him—have him in my clutches before a month is over, if he don't take alarm and get out of the country, and I will take good care, too, to make that an extremely difficult thing to do."

The detective was in high spirits, for he felt sure that he was on the right trail at last.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WEAVING THE WEB.

On upper Broadway is a well-known building wherein a whole colony of artists dwell, not that they really reside there, for none of them do. As the greater part of these children of genius were true sons of Bohemia, it was pretty hard to tell exactly where they did live; indeed, it would have puzzled some of the men themselves to give a correct account of where they had slept and taken their meals during the last month, for, restless and erratic, they delighted in daily change.

But this building was their head-quarters—their studios, where their patrons and chums could always find them, and a due regard for truth compels the statement that, to the majority of them, a hundred chums came to one patron. Let us add: it is a mystery how many of the young and unknown artists who come to Gotham in search of fame and fortune manage to get along at all, for, though they may paint pictures by the hundred, few and far between are the ones they sell. Fame in this world depends far more upon fickle fortune than the world at large is willing to acknowledge; luck has a great deal to do with it.

With one of this building's denizens we have to deal—with Valentine Orbison, a young artist who, only a couple of years before, had come from an Eastern city and had boldly flung himself into the vortex of metropolitan life, determined to win a place high in the line, or perish in the attempt.

And the young man did well-nigh perish, too, for long, bitter and hard was the struggle.

His pictures were unnoticed although really he was a very tolerable painter, but, like most young artists, he was entirely too ambitious in his choice of subjects. No patrons came; the young man's money began to run low and his courage to sink. In person the artist was a tall, handsome fellow, with jet-black hair and eyes, and a decidedly foreign look, just the sort of man to attract attention and be made a lion of if the attention of the capricious and fickle-minded public was ever attracted to him.

At last the young man became so hard pushed that he was reduced to make pencil drawings for the publications of the day in order to sustain life. This was an extremely precarious occupation, and the pay correspondingly poor, but he got enough to live on and a trifle over to pay for canvas and colors and the rent of his studio.

And while following this soul-depressing life, wondering if he would ever be able to do any better, he chanced one day in the Central Park to catch a glimpse of Miss Hero Salamander as she passed leisurely by in her father's sumptuous carriage.

It was the first time he had ever encountered the girl, and her wonderful beauty entranced him. Motionless, with all an artist's admiration, he stared at the society queen.

And when she passed along and was lost to his gaze like a fleeting vision, with a deep sigh he roused himself from his abstraction and returned to his studio.

He had made up his mind to paint no more, as he was tired of piling up pictures which no one seemed to care to buy even at the price of the canvas and colors used, but the glorious face of the girl haunted him, and he could not rest until he had transferred it from memory to the canvas. It was a simple, unstudied thing. Just the head and bust, that was all, like a simple portrait.

Never before in all his life had the artist worked so; never before did a picture so quickly grow under his hands. The likeness was excellent, but in addition, the cunning of the artist had invested the face with a certain nameless

something—a fascinating grace which greatly enhanced the really beautiful countenance.

The chum who dropped in to see Orbison, happened to be a sort of newspaper man who had a slight acquaintanceship with the old millionaire and his beautiful daughter.

He recognized the picture at once and loudly expressed his admiration, but he said:

"Old fellow, how the deuce did you manage to flatter her so. She is a beauty, this thing of yours—why, no mortal woman ever looked so bewitching or ever will."

This was the general opinion; it was a good likeness, but far more beautiful than the original or any other woman could hope to be.

Orbison was persuaded to send it to the annual exhibition, and there old Salamander and Hero saw it, and the millionaire was so impressed that he at once sought an acquaintance with the artist and purchased the picture at a large price, and also gave Orbison a commission to paint his picture.

The artist achieved another success. The portrait was old Salamander to the life, but, oh, ten times better-looking, every way!

Orbison at last had found his profession; he was a portrait-painter, and his magic pencil possessed the wonderful faculty of always improving the looks of the sitter. The likeness was good but the original was plain indeed compared with the counterfeit presentment.

It was not design on the part of the artist; he couldn't help it, and this astonishing power soon made him the most popular artist who yet had set up a studio in New York. He commanded his own price; his fame was made and fortune won, all through this lucky accident.

Miss Salamander and the artist were on most excellent terms, for it was the correct thing in good society to make much of that dear Mr. Orbison, and it had been broadly hinted that a match between the two was not unlikely, for, if the lady had money, the artist had fame, and so "honors were easy."

It was late in the afternoon; the artist had just dismissed his last sitter and was preparing for the street when a tall and rather peculiar-looking gentleman made his appearance.

Orbison recognized his caller although the new-comer had no idea that he was known, but the artist in his day of poverty, when he was doing odd sketches for the comic and illustrated newspapers, had been accustomed to often stroll into the police courts in search of hints, and therefore the person of the famous detective, Joe Phenix, was not strange to him.

He presumed that the bloodhound of the law, who stood head and shoulders above all other thief-takers in America, had come in reference to a portrait, and as the artist looked with a practical eye upon the strongly-marked face of the rogue's terror he thought he would rather enjoy the task of painting the portrait of such a man.

But Phenix had come strictly upon business, as he speedily explained.

He was proceeding to introduce himself when the artist told him that he might spare himself the trouble as he had often seen him in the police courts and was well acquainted with the nature of the peculiar calling he followed.

"In that case," remarked Phenix, with a grave bow, "it saves a world of explanation; but now, I have no doubt that you will be astonished when I tell you that my errand here to-day is to enlist you in my profession."

The artist was astonished and immediately said so.

"Let us be seated, for it will take me some little time to explain," Phenix said.

The two men helped themselves to chairs; then the detective proceeded to explain.

"Do not be astonished at what I may say, Mr. Orbison; and I beg also that you will not be annoyed at the extent of my knowledge," the thief-catcher began; "like doctors and lawyers we gentlemen of the detective force often pick up a great deal of information in regard to men and things utterly foreign to our business."

"I can readily understand that."

"Now, I am assured there has been quite a little love-affair between yourself and old Salamander's daughter, Hero—I beg that you will not be angry at my plain speaking!" Phenix hastened to exclaim, perceiving that the face of the artist turned scarlet at the bare mention of the name of the woman to whom, in truth, he was devoted, heart and soul.

"Sir, from what I know of you, I am convinced that you do not come here from any idle motive," the artist observed, recovering in part from his confusion; "so I will be as frank with you as you have been with me. I did cherish an affection for Miss Salamander, for to her I really owe my present position, and I have no doubt that I would have succeeded in winning the lady if it had not been for this Englishman, Calderwood, who seemed to fascinate her. His sudden death apparently again gave the lady to me, but now his brother has appeared on the scene, and Hero seems fascinated again."

"You are right; she is fascinated as the snake fascinates the bird, for this fellow is a rascal, a villain, who seeks to make her his prey. Will you aid to unmask him, and at the same time

save the woman you love from a dreadful fate?"

"I will!" cried the artist, excitedly, "to the utmost extent of my power."

"Make the acquaintance of this man; he is a member of your club, note the men with whom he is intimate as far as you are able. My idea is to put such a watch upon him by half a dozen trusty agents that from the time he rises in the morning until he seeks his bed at night he will never escape the eyes of my agents!"

"I'm with you heart and soul!" the artist cried.

A cunning web Joe Phenix was weaving.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN COUNCIL.

WHEN the Englishman, accosted by the unsavory O. B. Jones, proposed to go to the office of the man, he had not the slightest intention of entering into any confidential relations with him, but merely proposed the visit in order to see what kind of an office he had, thinking that he could judge from the man's surroundings what sort of character he was.

He wanted, too, to "pump" the fellow and find out how much he really did know, as it was just possible that Mr. Jones really knew very little about the case, but had merely picked up a fact here and there, had put them together and made a bold guess at the rest.

"Certainly, sir, I shall be delighted if you honor my poor office with a visit," replied the lawyer, in a cringing manner, and he rubbed his hands together with evident satisfaction, while Calderwood could not help thinking of the old legend of the spider and the fly.

"Of course I presume you do not expect to see such luxuriant chambers as those occupied by my learned brothers up-stairs," the man continued. "The clients who fall into my hands couldn't be made to pay for such style; and besides, the very air of respectability would be sure to frighten them away. My patrons are of the night-bird order, and they shun the glare and glitter of Broadway until after night-fall, when their prey is on the wing. With these night-hawks I do not class gentlemen like yourself who once in a while condescend to avail themselves of my poor services."

The more the man talked the better Calderwood was impressed with him, as a sharp, shrewd fellow, and no doubt an unscrupulous one—just the tool to fit the desperate purpose of a desperate hand.

"I don't care a copper piece what sort of chambers you occupy so long as you can render yourself useful to me," Calderwood rejoined.

And then again Mr. Jones bowed and grinned as he said: "It is not very far away—in Center street, just opposite the Tombs. I have to be near my clients, you know, and if you will have the kindness to follow I will conduct you there."

So the two set out.

In the sunlight the old man looked ten times more shabby and disreputable than he had appeared in the somewhat dimly-lighted entry, and Calderwood felt relieved when they passed from Broadway into the side street; he did not care that any of his fashionable up-town friends should see him in company with the beggarly-looking old shyster; and the old man, apparently conscious of this fact, plodded along in advance, and did not attempt to walk side by side with the gentleman.

As they walked along Calderwood could not help noticing that though the old man was bent by age, at one time he must have possessed wonderful strength, and the Englishman muttered to himself:

"The beggar would be an ugly customer in a row even now, old as he is."

As the shyster had stated, his office was right opposite that dark and gloomy pile, the city prison of New York, known far and wide from the character of its architecture as "The Tombs."

A small store on the first floor had been converted into an office. The shutters were up over the window, pierced here and there with holes to afford light. The glass of the door was glazed so as to prevent any one in the street from looking into the "sanctum sanctorum," and a small tin sign affixed to the outside of the door bore the inscription:

"O. B. JONES,

"Attorney and Counselor at Law."

At present another inscription appeared on the door; a small card was tacked to the wood work transcribed:

"Gone to court—be back at two."

The old lawyer, unlocking the door, invited the Englishman to enter.

"I do not rejoice in the luxury of an office-boy," he remarked. "I can't afford it; and besides, the most of my business is of such a nature that the less ears the better."

The office was wretchedly furnished; an old desk, upon the top of which a few very dilapidated law-books reposed, nearly all of them relating to criminal law, a couple of chairs and a

weather-beaten sofa, were all there was in the apartment.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable," and the old man motioned the Englishman to the sofa, while he carefully closed the door. "We are not likely to be disturbed; the business for the day is over, over yonder," and he jerked his thumb toward the Tombs, "and about all my clients come from there." Then the "professional" seated himself at the desk, but wheeled his chair around so as to face Calderwood.

"Now then, sir, we can speak freely; there isn't the least danger that anything we say will be overheard. I have to look out for that, for I can assure you, sir, there have been words spoken in this office which carried men's lives along with them."

Calderwood hadn't the least doubt of it; the more he saw of the man the more he was convinced that, if there was dark and dangerous work ahead, he could not find a man in all big New York who would "fill the bill" better and more completely than this disreputable old lawyer.

"But, to proceed to business," continued Mr. Jones, briskly; "these insurance people mean fight; probably your lawyers have informed you on that point?"

The Englishman nodded.

"And did they inform you upon what grounds they intended to fight?"

"The companies allege fraud."

"That is very broad and sweeping—very comprehensive in its extent," Mr. Jones observed, with an extremely wise nod of his aged head. "What fraud—how, and by whom?"

"In regard to that my lawyers are ignorant."

"Exactly," and Jones rubbed his hands, briskly, as though he enjoyed it. "That is where the insurance men are wise; they do not intend to show their hand until the time comes to play their cards, so, until that time, you won't be able to get the slightest idea whether they hold trumps or are trying to bluff you off with a poor hand. Now, then, I know their game!" and the lawyer leaned back in his chair and looked triumphantly at the Englishman.

"You will excuse me if I have doubts," Calderwood remarked. "I cannot, for the life of me, comprehend how you can possibly know any such thing."

The old counselor laughed, and winked one eye in an extremely significant manner.

"That is my secret, of course, and I don't intend to let the cat out of the bag, but I will convince you that what I say is true; which is all you really have any right to know, isn't it?"

"I really have no wish to pry into the secret details of your business."

"Mind you, this is a mysterious and not over sweet-smelling affair. The insurance men have been obliged to come down to detective officers and criminal lawyers, such as I am, to make any headway. By accident, I learned some of the particulars of the affair; the insurance men don't want me; they have got their men, already, so I can't make anything out of them; you see I am honest with you; but you can use me if you want me."

"But, when will the suit be tried?"

"Oh, curse the suit!" the old man exclaimed, emphatically. "I am not talking about trying any suits. The insurance folks don't want any suit if they can manage to settle the business out of court, but, if they can't bluff you off, and you force them to it, of course they will go into court. My idea is to fight the thing by any means, fair or foul, and the odds are ten to one it will be foul. They have certain proofs—certain witnesses; we must get at the proof—get at the witnesses, you understand?" The old sharp had lowered his voice to a whisper, and leaned over toward the Englishman, a hard, unscrupulous look upon his weather-beaten face.

"By Jove! old fellow, you are going on at a deuce of a rate!"

"You must fight fire with fire, you know," the other answered, with a hard laugh.

"Yes, but how about the law—suppose you get caught at this sort of thing, you know?"

"Nothing venture, nothing win! But, my dear sir, you must not get caught, and if you will rely upon me—"

"Yes, but I am not going to put my head in the lion's mouth!"

"There isn't the least need to do that; I will take all the risk, provided I am properly recompensed for the same."

Calderwood remained silent for quite a little while, evidently in a brown study, then he rose to his feet.

"I will think over the matter, and see you here, at this hour, to-morrow," he said.

"All right; I will be on hand." And then, in the most obsequious manner, he conducted the Englishman out.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DETERMINATION.

STRAIGHT across the street to the Tombs prison the Englishman went. An officer was lounging on the outside and of him Calderwood inquired concerning the presiding judge of the court.

"He's gone home, sir," the metropolitan replied.

"Yes, I presumed so, but I want to see him on particular business. Can you tell me at what hour I will be likely to find him at home and where he resides?"

"He dines at five—you will be sure to catch him just before five," and then the officer gave directions in regard to the judge's residence.

The Englishman thanked the official and proceeded up-town.

At a few minutes before five he called upon the judge. He found that gentleman at home, excused his call upon the plea that he sought important information, and then at once asked the judge in regard to O. B. Jones, stating that he had an important lawsuit on hand which that worthy was very anxious to take charge of; he further said that he was an entire stranger in the city, and as the lawyer had mentioned that he practiced in his honor's court, he naturally thought that he, the judge, would be qualified to pass an opinion upon Mr. Jones's ability.

His honor was very favorably impressed with the Englishman, and being a very blunt, decided sort of man—one of the police judges, who, thanks to skill in ward politics, had risen literally from the gutter to the bench—had no hesitation whatever in giving his opinion.

"Old Jones is a skin and a fraud, sir, from the word go!" he declared. "He's a smart old rascal and mighty well posted on criminal law, but he has no more honesty than a pickpocket. I believe he would sell his own father or brother for two cents if he could get a bid. If you have a good, fair and above-board case you haven't got the least use for such a man as Jones, but, if you have a slippery affair on hand, blackmail, criminal or anything of that sort, where there is a lot of dirty work to be done, the old scalawag will fill the bill as well as any man you can scare up in New York. The only thing is to keep your eyes on him for he'd sell you out in a minute if he got a chance."

Calderwood thanked the judge for his candor and then departed.

He had obtained the information which he had sought. As matters looked at present Jones was just the kind of man he had use for.

The Englishman went straight to his hotel and from there sent a telegram to Allister, who was at the country-house at the Highlands. The telegram read:

"Come up to-morrow by Sandy Hook boat. I will meet you at pier."

Allister received this dispatch all right, and came up to the city as requested, to be met at the pier by Calderwood.

"Where is that woman?" was the Englishman's first remark.

Allister understood that he referred to Miss Helen Lodge.

"She went away day before yesterday."

"I thought so; she has been three times to the hotel to see me."

"But you contrived to avoid her?"

"Oh, yes; but I can't dodge her forever, you know; she is bound to catch me one of these days, and the chances are that she will make a scene which will be deuced disagreeable," Calderwood grumbled. "How did she talk when she went away? Was she disposed to be quiet and reasonable, or was she stiff-necked and bent upon making trouble?"

"Neither; she was non-committal."

"That is a bad sign," the Englishman observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, a very bad sign indeed, in my opinion, for it means mischief. I questioned her as closely as I could, but she would not say what she would do. She said that she hadn't made up her mind—she would consult her friends in New York and probably be guided by their advice."

A short, sharp oath escaped from the lips of the Englishman.

"Her friends in New York!" he exclaimed; "she means this infernal detective, Joe Phenix, and the insurance people. I have got a little insight into the game they are disposed to play," and then he related the particulars of his interview with old Jones.

Allister shook his head at this recital; he scented danger.

"What is the matter? You don't seem to take kindly to this idea," Calderwood observed.

"I am cursedly afraid of a trap!" Allister declared, bluntly. "How do you know that this devilish Joe Phenix isn't at the back of the whole affair?"

"I hardly think that is possible," and then he told his companion how he had interviewed the judge in regard to the old lawyer.

Still Allister was not satisfied.

"I know everything looks all right, but I am like a rat that has once escaped from a trap—I distrust everything now. If Ethelwood Calderwood had only taken my advice he would never have been mixed up with this infernal woman."

"Oh, well; all men have crazy streaks at times," the other answered. "The mischief is done, and we must do our best to get out of the

hobble. I tell you, old fellow, there is a web weaving around us that we must either break or else be strangled by it. I am watched, now, day and night. The thing is very skillfully done for this country, but I have had too much experience in that line across the water in both France and England, where they have reduced espionage to a science, not to detect the rawer article here. I presume I am indebted for this little attention to my esteemed friend, Mr. Joe Phenix, but, how much the man really knows, and how much he suspects, is of course a mystery to me. If I could only get a look at his hand, so as to know what trumps he holds—"

"Ah, yes, but that is a clear impossibility!" Allister interrupted. "We have got to play our game by guessing at his. We are strong at every point except where this woman is concerned; there we are weak, terribly weak. She has been at the bottom of all the mischief, and, no matter whether she has been barking on a false scent or a true one, she has contrived to stir up everybody against us. If she and Phenix hadn't happened to come together, the insurance men would not have thought of making a fight; probably they wouldn't have been willing to pay the whole amount of the insurance money, for they were hit pretty hard, but, most certainly, they would have been willing to compromise, and have paid a good share of the money."

"I know this woman business was a terrible blunder, and the man, I tell you, was crazy, or he would never have committed such an act of folly!" the other exclaimed, impatiently. "But, now that accident has thrown this old lawyer in our way, the very tool, apparently, we need to insure success, you hesitate about accepting his aid."

"This cursed police spy has taken the steel all out of me," the other grumbled. "How can you tell but he is one of the secret agents of Phenix, skillfully put forward to entrap us into a position where Phenix can bag us with certainty?"

"Well, if we are fools enough to allow such an operation to be performed, we ought to be bagged," the other replied. "But, for my part, I do not think there is any danger. This old fellow is a shrewd and cunning rascal; Phenix and the insurance companies are employing just such men as he is in this affair, for only such men would be willing to do the dirty work which must be done. Such fellows are all acquainted with each other, and from some loose-tongued chap, in the employ either of Phenix or the insurance men, this old rascal has wormed a knowledge of these movers in the dark. Now, my idea is to take him into our pay; the other party can't possibly afford to pay him any more than we can, and, just so long as we are able to outbid the others we can depend upon him for our man. Let us see what he advises, and learn what he knows."

"We must be careful, though, not to put ourselves in his power."

"Of course, that is understood!" the Englishman responded. "We are neither of us children, I believe; I think we have come to years of discretion, and our game is to keep our matters to ourselves, and, at the same time, learn all he knows."

"It will do no harm to make the trial," Allister admitted.

"Not the least in the world, and if the man is Phenix's spy, and it is all a deep-laid plot to entrap us, why, then, we are nothing but a couple of shallow fools if we are caught, for it will be with our eyes open."

"That is true; when will you see him?"

"I was to call this afternoon, but we will go at once, so that, if there is anything wrong in the affair, we will take him before he is prepared to receive us."

The idea struck Allister as being a good one; so the two proceeded directly to the law-office in Center street.

The aged legal shark was at home, and he received his visitors with a great deal of satisfaction. It was plain that he anticipated making a good thing out of the affair.

He pressed his visitors to be seated, and was very careful to close the outer door.

Allister had kept a quiet watch upon the old man since entering, and, as the lawyer turned to shut the door, he said, in a low tone, to Calderwood:

"I have seen this man before."

"Where?"

"That I cannot tell; I do not remember, but I am certain that I have seen him somewhere."

"Keep a good watch upon him; possibly you may remember."

The door securely shut, the old man returned, seated himself at his desk, and smiled benignantly upon his visitors.

CHAPTER XXX.

PLOTTING MISCHIEF.

THE old shyster had spoken truly when he said there was very little danger of a conversation in this peculiar office being overheard, as both the visitors understood, after a glance around.

"This is Mr. Allister, formerly the confidential man of business of my late brother, Ethel-

wold Calderwood," said the Englishman, introducing his companion.

Mr. Jones ducked his gray head in the cringing, obsequious bow so natural to him, and expressed the high delight he felt in making Mr. Allister's acquaintance.

Allister replied briefly to the greeting, all the while intently studying the face of the old shark, who, sharp as he was, never seemed to notice this scrutiny. Allister, as he had said, was certain that he was no stranger, but when or where or under what circumstances he had met the other, memory refused to define, although as a rule he had a wonderful recollection of faces.

"I am really delighted to see you, gentlemen, in my poor office!" Jones declared, with a flourish of his muscular hands. "I am rejoiced, because I know that I can be of service to you, and because I know the case is such a one that, if I succeed in helping you to win it, you can afford to pay me a good big fee. Of course, you know, money is what we are all after!" and here the old man leered significantly at the two.

"I thought I would come and see you this morning instead of this afternoon as I had made up my mind to talk business and I thought the quicker we got at it the better," Calderwood explained.

"Certainly—certainly, that was right; always take time by the forelock—strike when the iron is hot; that is my sentiment exactly," and again the old fellow rubbed his hands together with evident self-satisfaction.

Allister began to waver in his opinion, and believed that he had never encountered the lawyer before.

"And you have come to do business, eh?" the old shark continued; "I am so glad—so very glad! It will be money in our pockets, I know it will. I presume this gentleman is entirely in your confidence, and that I may speak freely before him?" and he nodded toward Allister.

"Oh, yes, I have no secrets from him," Calderwood answered.

"Very good—very good indeed; there is nothing like good advisers. Now, then, I presume I may consider myself retained on your behalf."

Calderwood understood this to be a gentle reminder that no fee as yet had been tendered, so he took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket-book and gave it to the lawyer. Clutching it eagerly he quickly thrust it into his vest-pocket, his hand trembling for the nonce and resembling more the talons of a bird of prey than anything else.

"Now then I am your humble slave to command!" he exclaimed, theatrically. "And now then at once to plunge into the mazes of business. You seek to get from certain insurance companies certain sums of money due by the death of your brother, Ethelwold Calderwood, who departed this life at his country seat at the Highlands of Navesink a short time ago." As the old man spoke he checked off his words with one bony finger upon the other in a methodical manner.

Calderwood nodded.

"The insurance companies have declined to pay, alleging fraud, but as yet they have not specified the particular manner in which the fraud has been committed, nor by whom."

Again Calderwood nodded assent.

"Your lawyers are all at sea, for, not knowing the particular way in which the attack will be made, nor the quarter from whence it will come, they are utterly unable to devise a means of resisting the afore-said attack."

This was very concisely and plainly put.

"Now the insurance men being pretty heavily hit in this matter, and feeling sore over it, at once set out to find some excuse for resisting payment of the money. Their first move has been to employ the once noted police-spy, now a private detective, Joe Phenix, to look into the manner of your brother's death, to see if there was anything suspicious about it—anything upon which they might raise a quibble to avert the loss. Phenix, in discharge of this mission, encountered a certain woman named Helen Lodega. This woman had been a housekeeper to Ethelwold Calderwood, had succeeded in fascinating him, and the pair had been privately married only a week before the death of Calderwood, so she says, although she is not able to offer the least evidence in the world to back up this assertion except a peculiar bequest under very strange conditions made by the dead man in his will—a bequest utterly without reason except that, as the woman declares, he had placed himself in her power by marrying her, and hoped, by the legacy, to buy her silence in regard to the secret union. An utterly ridiculous idea, as the man ought to have known, for women of the Lodega stamp are not easily bought off. It is their game to get every cent they can. Instead of the legacy quieting Miss Lodega, it enraged her; she thought that she was being wronged; she had an idea that there had been foul play—that Calderwood had been foully dealt with, and at once announced her determination not to rest until she had penetrated into the mystery of Calderwood's death. And there, gen-

tlemen, was where the first error was committed. I speak on the assumption that there had been a little gum game going on. When it was discovered that the woman was going to be ugly, she ought to have been silenced, there and then."

"Silenced?" queried Calderwood, as if he did not quite comprehend the lawyer's meaning.

"Silenced?" repeated Allister, with a stare.

The lawyer laughed—a short, dry chuckle.

"You do it very well, gentlemen, very well, indeed, but if you don't understand what I mean I shall not take the trouble to explain. Well, this woman not being silenced but allowed to go on in her mad career, has made trouble. She was as hot on the scent as a bloodhound, and although she made very little progress, yet she managed to meet Phenix; and the detective, already employed by the insurance men, when he heard her story, at once had clues to work on. In the dead of night the body of Calderwood was taken up, the idea being to hold a secret medical examination so as to discover whether the man had been poisoned, as the woman believed, or whether the death was from natural causes, as the doctors who attended the man had declared.

"When the body was raised and examined, the face was discovered to have been mutilated, whether by accident or design was of course a question, but Miss Lodega pushed all speculation aside by declaring that, although the body closely resembled Ethelwold Calderwood, yet it was not his remains. Of course the very moment this declaration was made, the insurance companies had a case. If the grave had been tampered with—Calderwood's body removed, and another one substituted in its place, or if there had been some skillful jugglery about the deathbed of the man, so that another body had been deposited in the grave supposed to contain the mortal remains of Calderwood—which ever way the trick had been done, it mattered not so long as the discovery of fraud was made, for the insurance people held the false body and the woman as a witness; their money was safe. And this false body gave Phenix a clew, too, and one upon which he and all his assistants have been working day and night ever since the discovery was made. He believes that there has been an extremely clever trick played; he has got the idea into his head that Calderwood did not die at all, but that the death was a sham—that the whole thing was a blind to defraud the insurance companies out of a big stake, and that there is a whole secret organization at the back of the plot working like one man to put it through."

The faces of Calderwood and Allister were a study just then, although both of them, men of ice and iron, were striving their utmost to appear unconcerned. But there was a pallor on their countenances, a rigid stiffening of the muscles about the mouth, a peculiar ominous glitter in their eyes, that even their strong will could not repress.

The lawyer, busy in his explanation, paid no apparent heed to the two, but continued:

"You see, the whole case hinges on the body, on the woman, and on Phenix. The body and the woman are the strong points; Phenix is not dangerous unless his guess is right that Calderwood is alive and he should succeed in finding him—which I presume is improbable. All that stands between you and the money is the body and the woman—we may say the woman alone, for no one else can identify the body."

"And if the woman should disappear suddenly?" Allister asked, with a lowering face.

"You would beat the insurance men."

"Do you think you could persuade the woman to go away?" Allister asked, meaningly.

"Oh, yes," the lawyer answered, carelessly. "It will cost money though."

"How much?"

"Five hundred dollars would be apt to persuade her," the old shark replied.

CHAPTER XXXI.

INFERNAL DEVICES.

THE two men looked at each other, doubt written upon their faces, while from the corner of his eyes the old lawyer watched them narrowly.

"This is risky business," Calderwood observed at last, his face deadly pale and a slight nervous tremor perceptible about the corners of his mouth.

Allister, on the contrary, although fully as anxious and excited as his companion, yet showed a dogged resolution in his face, which it was plain the other lacked. He was by far the stronger-willed of the two, it was evident, when it came to earnest, resolute work where the chances of a rope and hanging match must be taken into consideration.

"Risky!" exclaimed the lawyer, with the short, dry laugh which he affected so much—"well, perhaps it is, and perhaps it isn't, but there is an old proverb that says nothing venture, nothing win."

"But murder is a ticklish thing," Calderwood remarked, in a low voice that trembled in spite of his efforts.

"Murder!" exclaimed the lawyer, with well-simulated amazement; "bless me! who said

anything about murder? What queer ideas you have! I was merely suggesting that this lady, this Miss Helen Lodega, might be persuaded to go away, so that when the time came for the insurance people to call her as a witness they would not be able to get hold of her at all."

"But, you don't know this woman!" Allister exclaimed.

"Oh, don't I?" and again the lawyer chuckled.

"She is a devil—a very devil—as full of mischief as an egg is of meat. She has taken it into her head that she has been wronged in this matter, and is determined to move heaven and earth to get square. I know the woman, I tell you! She is dangerous." Allister was greatly in earnest. "If Calderwood had taken my advice he would have had nothing to do with her. I foresaw from the beginning that she would be certain to make mischief, but Calderwood made an ass of himself; he got infatuated with the adventuress and was determined to have her at any price, no matter how great the risk. You will not be able to persuade her to do anything except to follow the dictates of her own sweet will. She has already been offered five thousand dollars cash to go quietly away and trouble her head no more about the affair."

"And she refuses, eh?"

"Yes, and I don't see how you could hold out any greater inducement."

"Ah, well: you don't know how persuasive I am, sometimes," and the old fellow uttered another series of dry chuckles.

"You won't persuade her, except by killing her," Allister declared.

"Oh, we mustn't talk about killing, you know; that would be a hanging matter," and the old shark grinned. "Well, now, as you seem averse to my trying my persuasive arts upon her, another idea suggests itself. If I understand the case rightly, all this woman's interest arises from Ethelwold Calderwood. If you can make it clear to her that Calderwood has not been foully dealt with of course you remove the motive for her persistent endeavors to pry into this affair. I don't know what the game has been in this instance and I never attempt to pry into affairs that do not concern me; but if Phenix has guessed rightly and Calderwood is alive, the whole thing being a cunning plan to make a stake out of the insurance companies, why then it is the simplest thing in the world to let her into the secret, and the moment that is done she becomes your ally and will work for you instead of against you."

Again the two men exchanged a look full of meaning, and again the old fellow watched them as a cat watches a mouse and yet without apparently doing so.

"What you say is simply absurd!" Allister declared. "Calderwood is dead and gone, and no man will ever see him alive again in this world; so the idea that you suggest cannot be worked. Phenix is a smart enough fellow, but he doesn't know everything. He is barking on the wrong scent this time, but it is just as well to let him go on, for as long as he follows the wrong track he won't be apt by accident to stumble upon the right one. You have struck the key-note of the whole affair when you say that the woman must be got out of the way, but the question is which is the easiest way to accomplish it?"

"Five hundred dollars will fix it, sir, and without any trouble at all."

"No risk?"

"None at all."

"You are sure of this?" Calderwood queried, his face pale and anxious.

"Look at me!" and the old lawyer displayed himself; "do I look like a man who would thrust his neck into a halter for a paltry five hundred dollars? No, sir; I like money as well as the next man, but I value my neck at a much higher price than five hundred dollars."

"But how do you propose to effect this object?" Calderwood persisted.

"Ah, my dear sir, that is my business," the old shark replied, blandly but decidedly. "You really haven't any right, you know, to pry into that, so long as I do what I agree."

"But what proof will you give us that you can accomplish this?" Allister asked, evidently still suspicious and hesitant.

"The best of proof; you yourself shall see the job done. All that is necessary is to get the woman to come here."

"Here?" and Calderwood looked around the apartment. He understood what was meant: death by violence was to silence the voice of Helen Lodega, although the lawyer was careful not to speak out plainly.

"Yes, here; nothing suspicious visible, eh?"

"No."

"Just a plain and rather poorly-furnished office, eh?"

"Yes."

"When the lady walks in here and the door closes behind her she will not see anything to excite her suspicions, eh?"

"No, nothing, as far as I can see," Calderwood admitted.

"And that is also your opinion too?" Jones asked of Allister.

"Nothing at all."

"It is an old building," and the lawyer looked about him, "a very old building, dreadfully out of repair, quite unsafe at times."

And then, without moving from his chair, the shark pressed his heel upon the head of a huge nail which projected from the floor—there was no carpet—right under his chair, and, as if by magic, with the rapidity of lightning, a square trap flapped down right in the middle of the room, leaving a great black, gaping hole through which ascended the damp noxious air of the vault beneath.

So suddenly was this trick performed and so entirely unexpected was it, that, although both Calderwood and Allister were men of wonderful nerve, they fairly started aghast when the great black gulf in the floor opened right at their feet.

The old lawyer laughed with delight as he witnessed the effect produced.

"How is that for high, eh?" he exclaimed. "What wit—what shrewdness—what wisdom can guard against a surprise of this kind, even if the woman suspects treachery and is on her guard against it?"

Allister rose from his seat and looked down into the dark and gloomy void from whence the dank air came reeking up.

It was a good ten or twelve feet to the bottom and as dark below as the shades of Egypt renowned in story.

"It would be a pretty severe fall," he observed, thoughtfully.

"It would not be like sinking down on a feather-bed," the shark assured.

"The woman would be certainly stunned—perhaps killed."

"Oh, bless you, no! It is only twelve or fifteen feet to the bottom; not the least danger of any serious hurt—a slight shaking up, that is all; but, that is nothing to you, you know; you won't have anything to do with it. If the worst happens it is a sad accident, that is about the size of it; the floor was weak and suddenly gave way; you see?" and the old fellow grinned in a diabolical way.

"Are there any means of getting into the cellar except by the trap?" Calderwood asked, thoughtfully.

"Oh, no; of course not. This break is quite accidental, you know." And then the lawyer pressed his heel upon another large nail under his chair and a little door in the wall, right by the side of the desk, flew open, disclosing a slender stairway which evidently led to the lower regions.

"Bless me!" Mr. Jones exclaimed, in pretended amazement, "if there isn't a break in the wall too!"

Old and cool hands as were the two men, well used to all sorts of tricks and traps, yet they were certainly astonished at the well arranged machinery of this legal hyena's den.

Mr. O. B. Jones was a veritable ogre, and a client in his hands had no more chance for himself, if it was to the interest of the lawyer to play him false, than a simple honest fly entangled in the spider's web.

"Hey, presto, *change!*" and with the exclamation the lawyer pressed both his heels again upon the nails and both yawning trap and gaping door disappeared.

"You see I am well prepared to carry out my little schemes. Give me the five hundred—you need not pay until after the job is done—and I will get the woman out of the way. You shall witness the workings of the affair with your own eyes—from this closet here." The lawyer went to the wall on the other side of the desk, and, touching a secret spring, a door opened, revealing a cavity large enough to hold two or three men, and in the door holes were cunningly arranged so that any one in the closet could not only hear but see everything that transpired within the room.

Oh, this was a marvelous apartment, unpretending as it appeared!

The two conspirators exchanged glances; each sought the opinion of the other; and without a word they understood; and the lawyer, watching them as eagerly as a hawk on the scent for prey, perceived that his offer was accepted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WALKING INTO THE TRAP.

MISS LODEGA was really a very indefatigable woman; she had made up her mind that she would see Marmaduke Calderwood and have a talk with him, and so she fairly haunted the Brevoort House until the obliging clerks of the hotel began to look upon her as a nuisance and even the hall porter, who had charge of the lady's entrance, mentally groaned when he saw the persistent caller approaching.

And as for Calderwood, who as persistently avoided her, he confided to the clerks that he had no wish to encounter the visitor.

"She used to be my brother's housekeeper," he explained, "and I know deuced well what she wants out of me. It's the sympathy dodge, you know. She's lost her place and feels dreadfully about his death—the best friend she ever had—was like a brother to her and all that sort of rubbish, and the idea is, you know, as you fellows say here in America, she wants to make a

'stake' out of me, but I will be hanged if I am going to stand it."

And, being thus warned, the hotel people were not over and above civil to the lady, but used to rebuffs she did not relax in her endeavors to "catch" Mr. Marmaduke Calderwood; but as that gentleman was constantly on the alert the nearest she came to the accomplishment of her purpose was the meeting of Allister. Feeling sure that the confidential man of business was in constant communication with the Englishman she opened fire on him at once.

"Why is it that I am unable to see Mr. Calderwood?" she asked, indignantly. "Why is it that he avoids me so persistently? I have called to see him now ten or fifteen times and yet I have never been able to get sight of him, let alone speech with him."

"That certainly is strange," Allister remarked, with an astonishment that the lady knew full well was assumed.

"It is not strange!" she cried, impulsively; "it is not accident—it is design. I am no child nor am I any one's fool. I know that he has been in the hotel a half-dozen times when I have called, but he denies himself to me. If I were a man I would see him in spite of his denials, but, being a woman, I cannot force myself upon his presence."

"Then why do you wish to see him as long as the interview is distasteful to him, as I presume it is else he would take pains to meet you?"

"Why do I wish to see him?" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Why? I wish to hear from his own lips all that he knows about this dark mystery!"

"My dear Miss Lodega, you seem to forget that he knows absolutely nothing whatever about it. He was not in the country when the death occurred."

"But, why is it he does not want to see me?" the lady persisted.

"Simply, I presume, because he has a horror of disagreeable things, and I fancy he has got the impression from the way in which you have conducted yourself since the sad event took place that you would not be an agreeable visitor. He has made you a very fair offer, an offer which I must say you are very foolish not to accept, and which I think he is equally foolish in making, because there isn't the least certainty about his getting the insurance money, and if he doesn't get it he will be out just so much."

"Why doesn't he see me then, and explain these matters to me?" she demanded. "I will be reasonable—very reasonable—if I am only treated right. But, if I am defied and baited into resistance I can be as ugly as any one."

"Well, now, you are talking sensible, and I am sure that if he knew you were in this frame of mind he would see you and strive to put everything in the proper light."

"You go and tell him how reasonable I am and beg him to see me. I tell you frankly, Mr. Allister, that I am afraid of you and I do not trust you; perhaps I am wrong but I cannot help it."

"My dear Miss Lodega, I am perfectly neutral in this matter; I am neither for nor against you; in fact, I haven't the slightest interest in the affair at all, only I hate to see you make a fool of yourself by refusing the money which is ready for you."

"Go to Mr. Calderwood and tell him that I will listen to reason—tell him I will give up the contest and take the money if he will give me his word of honor as a gentleman that there has not been any foul play attending his brother's death!" The woman was in evident earnest.

"He will give you that assurance quickly enough."

"But, where and when can I see him?"

Allister was silent for a moment as if reflecting.

"Miss Lodega," he said, at last, "I hate to interfere in this matter, for Mr. Calderwood might not like it, but I happen to know that he has an appointment with his lawyer this afternoon. I will give you the address; you can go there and you will be sure to catch him, and my officiousness in the case need not appear, for I rely upon you, of course, to keep this interview secret."

"Certainly; I will be as silent as the grave."

Allister took a card from his pocket and wrote the address upon it, then gave it to the lady. It read:

"O. B. Jones, No. — Center street, at four o'clock."

"You know where Center street is?"

"Oh, yes; the Tombs is there."

"This Jones is a well-known criminal lawyer whom Mr. Calderwood has retained in his suit against the insurance companies, and his office is right opposite the Tombs, so that you cannot miss it."

"Oh, I will find it—trust me for that!" her face lighting up as she put the card carefully away.

Then the two parted.

A bitter smile curled Allister's lips.

"The woman will walk straight to her death and without a fight!"

muttered. "She is going to be 'reasonable,' hey! I know better, for I see an untamed devil glittering in her eyes. She is determined to take stock of this second Calderwood since she succeeded so well with the first. But No. 2 is not like No. 1, and is not to be twisted around her finger. If it had not been for the act of folly with this woman all would have been smooth sailing and we would have had the handling of the insurance money before this time. 'Were I a God and had a world to make I'd make no women.'"

And with this significant quotation Allister proceeded on his way.

That afternoon at ten minutes past four Miss Lodega tapped at the door of the old lawyer's den, which she found without any trouble, thanks to Allister's directions.

The old lawyer, with pen behind ear, answered the summons.

"Has Mr. Calderwood arrived yet?" she asked, as if she had come to meet that gentleman by appointment.

"No, miss, not yet, but I expect him every moment; he was to be here at four o'clock."

"Yes, that was the hour; I will walk in and wait for him if you have no objections."

"Certainly not, miss," and Jones hastened to open the door, and then, after the lady had entered, closed it carefully behind her.

The lady surveyed the dingy apartment with considerable curiosity, remaining near the door.

With obsequious politeness the old lawyer placed a chair near the desk.

"If you will have the kindness to be seated," he said. "You will not have long to wait, for Mr. Calderwood is generally very punctual."

"Thank you," the lady replied, and then she advanced toward the chair, which she was never destined to reach, for the heel of the old lawyer was upon the projecting nail, and when Miss Lodega was fairly in the center of the trap he applied the pressure that released the spring.

The trap gave way under the woman at once and with a half-suppressed scream she sunk into the yawning gulf beneath.

Jones pressed the spring and reclosed the trap at once, and at the same moment the door of the secret closet sprung open and revealed the pale and anxious features of Allister and Calderwood.

Like three statues the three men paused and listened with bated breath.

Had the sound of the woman's scream as she sunk through the floor penetrated to the street and attracted attention?

Of course there were passers-by without; had the scream fallen upon listening ears?

Fully a minute they all stood, their breaths coming thick and hard, but there was nothing to indicate that the last despairing cry of the unfortunate woman had passed beyond the stout and heavy door.

The old lawyer was the first to speak.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed, nervous and excited; "I was afraid that perhaps some one in the street might have heard the scream. But now I will attend to her down below," and he drew a long, glittering knife from the breast of his coat. "This will persuade her not to trouble you more," he continued, as he displayed the gleaming steel. Then he hurried through the secret door and down the secret stairway.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SURPRISE.

A LONG breath came from Calderwood's lips and a look of anguish overspread his face. He tottered forward into the room and sunk into a chair. Allister followed him at once.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed, roughly, "what nonsense is this?"

"I cannot help it," Calderwood exclaimed; "this woman's death appalls me."

"It is either her death or our ruin," the other replied.

"I know it, and yet I would have spared her if it had been possible."

"But it is not! Come, this is no time to show the white feather, for we have serious work ahead, or I greatly miss my guess."

Though Calderwood might be the abler man, as far as scheming went, yet, when the time for downright action came, the confidential man of business was, by far, the better of the two.

Then, from the depths of the vaults below, came the faint sound of a woman's scream.

Calderwood started and clutched his companion's arm.

"Hark! do you hear that?" he exclaimed in a trembling voice.

"Oh, yes, it means that mischief is doing, or else that they are playing a farce down there for our especial benefit."

Calderwood stared at his companion; he did not understand the meaning of the speech.

Both listened attentively, but no other sound came from the lower regions.

"It is all over," Calderwood muttered; "Heaven rest her soul, the wretch has killed her."

"And if he hasn't, we will kill him, eh?"

perplexed no less by the words of the speech, than by the strange way in which it was uttered. Then the heavy tread of the old man's footsteps was heard on the stairs of the secret descent into the lower vault.

Calderwood rose to his feet, nervous with excitement, and the look upon the stern face of Allister also plainly showed that he was greatly agitated, although, apparently, from a different cause from his companion.

Through the secret door, up from the darkness of the foul and reeking cellar-vault, came the old lawyer. In his hand he held the long and glittering knife, and, as he ascended into the light, bright, crimson stains could plainly be seen upon the polished surface of the shining steel.

Calderwood at once caught sight of this tell-tale evidence of the dark deed which had evidently been perpetrated in the underground region, and which the smothered scream of the woman had, in a measure, indicated. He was very pale, already, but now he turned paler still; his limbs trembled, and again he sunk into the chair, evidently totally unnerved.

"Well, how is it?" Allister asked. He was evidently made of much stouter stuff than the Englishman.

For answer, the old man held up the knife, upon the bright steel of which the crimson stains were only too apparent. Then he lifted up one of the skirts of the long, old-fashioned, black frock coat which he wore, and proceeded to remove the tell-tale marks which only too plainly pointed at a deed of blood. Not the least trace of emotion did he show; evidently the scene in the cellar, in which he had been the principal actor, did not trouble him much.

"You have left the door open," Allister remarked, pointing to the secret way to the underground region.

"Oh, yes, I forgot; I must make that secure, and then we are ready for visitors."

The old man put the knife away carefully, and then turned to close the door, but, not two steps had he taken when Allister, who had been watching his opportunity, sprung forward, and, with a short, loaded club, which he had drawn from its place of concealment—a secret pocket in the breast of his coat—gave the lawyer a terrible blow on the head, almost heavy enough to fell an ox.

The old wretch, taken entirely by surprise, threw up his hands with a hollow groan, as he pitched forward upon his face.

Calderwood sprung to his feet in amazement. "Great Heavens, Allister, you have killed the man!" he cried.

"Indeed I hope so, but I fear there is no such good luck in store for us," Allister answered, and much to the astonishment of the other, who was utterly in the dark as to the meaning of the words.

"Why do you want to kill the man?" Calderwood demanded. "He is a useful tool—just the kind we need."

"Do you think so?" Allister asked, dryly. "Perhaps I can change your opinion on that subject; in fact, I am quite sure you will change your mind when I show you who Mr. O. B. Jones really is. I knew I had met him, somewhere, the moment I set eyes upon his face, but he is a cunning rascal, and for a time utterly baffled me. Now, look at him!"

Allister rolled the senseless man over on his face, stripped off the wig of gray hair, and the false whiskers, and, lo! Joe Phenix, the detective, stood revealed!

With an oath Calderwood sprung forward; he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes, so clever had been the disguise of this sleuth-bond of the law.

"Although I knew that I had seen the man somewhere before, for both face and voice were familiar to me despite the skillful way in which he managed to disguise both, still I was not able to guess who he was until just at the moment when the woman went through the trap; then, as I was watching him closely, for the moment he forgot himself, relaxed his guard over his face, and I recognized him."

"You think, then that this woman business was nothing but a decoy?"

"No doubt whatever about it; it was a clever trick arranged between the two, and designed to lull us into confidence. Phenix thought we would put complete trust in him after this and make him a party to our plans; then, when he was in complete possession of all our schemes, how easy to spring the trap and bring us before the bar of justice with such evidence that conviction would be certain!"

"No doubt! no doubt that was his plan, and but for your sharp eyes he would certainly have succeeded."

"The fellow is the boss thief-catcher of the age!" Allister exclaimed, as he contemptuously spurned the form of the senseless man with his foot, "but, so far, he hasn't succeeded in catching us, although this was the cleverest trick that I ever heard of."

"But, where is the woman?"

"In the cellar, of course, but undoubtedly unharmed; you can bet your life that there was a pile of mattresses or straw under the trap to break her fall. Phenix played a bold game, and

but for the accident of my penetrating his disguise he most certainly would have won. Where he is weak is that he has no proof, although plenty of suspicions."

"But, what is to be done, now?"

"Get out of this as soon as we can," and then he cast a ferocious glance upon the senseless man. "I would like to finish this job now and make an end both of this infernal detective and of the woman, but I dare not, for the risk is too great. I have no doubt that he has some of his fellows down-stairs and another squad without so as to have assistance handy in case of accident. If I had given him a chance to cry out, he would have had them down upon us, and that is the reason why I determined to stun him at the first crack."

"Let us get out as soon as we can, then; if he has men outside do you think they will interfere with us?"

"Why should they? What reason have they? We have not done anything, or, at any rate, there is no proof that we have which this fellow can get at. If we were engaged in a hand-to-hand fight here, with Phenix, there might be some cause for police interference, but, as it is, there isn't the slightest. Suspicious are not proof, you know."

"Let us be going, then; but, I say, wouldn't it be a joke to leave a line for this fellow expressing our regrets, etc.?"

The idea chimed in with the humor of the other, so he took a pencil and a scrap of paper from his pocket and scribbled a brief epistle.

"MY DEAR PHENIX:

"Sorry that we cannot stay and enjoy your agreeable society a little while longer but business calls us away. Before we go we cannot refrain though from expressing delight at your clever disguise. The stars of the theatrical stage must hide their diminished heads when you are around. That you couldn't carry the thing out to the end is to be regretted, for this is the third time you have tried it on, and each time it has failed. But, be patient, and you may make the rifle one of these days, and if so, may we be there to see."

Then at the bottom of the note Allister drew the figure of a skeleton key.

"But, haven't you killed him?" Calderwood asked, as Allister bent over the prostrate form to pin the note to the coat.

"Oh, no; no fear of that; the fellow has a skull like an ox," Allister assured. "He's all right—breathing, and in a minute or two he will revive."

"Let us be off then. Curse the fellow! I wish he was dead, for I am afraid we will never have any peace while he is alive."

"We will get a chance to crack his skull in dead earnest one of these days, without risking our necks inside the hangman's rope either," Allister declared.

Then the two left the office and passed out into the street, standing a moment with the door ajar, and bidding adieu to an imaginary person within, to lull the suspicion of any watcher without that there had been anything wrong.

The ruse was successful.

Phenix did have his men posted outside and near at hand, but they were completely deceived by the clever trick of the two and did not attempt to interfere with them.

The battle was not ended yet, though.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT LAST.

In about five minutes after the departure of the precious pair, consciousness began to return to the stricken detective. He had received a terrible blow, and if he had not possessed a good hard head, the career of Joe Phenix would have ended there and then, a "consummation most devoutly to be wished" by all the "cracksmen" of the town. But, fate had not willed that the greatest detective of the age should be thus rudely cut off.

Beyond the shock, he had received very little damage. Slowly his senses returned, and, at last, sitting upright, he looked around, hardly able at first to comprehend the situation. But the wig and whiskers lying upon the floor, whither they had been cast, as well as the pain of his aching head, soon made him understand what had happened.

Then his eyes fell upon the paper pinned to his coat. He unfastened and perused it.

"Mighty cool hands," he muttered, as he read, "but the game is not ended yet, and he laughs best who laughs last."

Phenix rose to his feet and carefully replaced his disguise, although, as far as the Skeleton Keys were concerned, it had outlived its usefulness.

It had been a clever dodge, and but for the really wonderful sagacity of Allister would have succeeded.

There was such a man as O. B. Jones; he was a lawyer of rather unsavory reputation, and Phenix, in his disguise, very closely resembled him.

The detective had bargained with the legal gentleman to absent himself for a while from his usual haunts, so as to allow him to masquerade in his place, and had provided the trap-door and secret stairway, for just such a plot as had been carried out.

Phenix's idea was, by seeming to fall at once into the schemes of these men, to gain their confidence. The bold plan of destroying the woman, apparently committing murder, was excellently devised. A man who would steep his hands in blood surely might be trusted. Hardly one chance out of a hundred for such a plot's failure, but fate seemed leagued with the band of rogues.

As Allister's epistle said, this was the third time the devices of the detective had failed, and at the very time, too, when success was apparently assured.

But, Phenix now had good grounds to go upon—good clues to follow, for it was evident that both Calderwood and Allister were prominent members of the powerful league which so long had successfully defied the efforts of the police—probably the two leading spirits of the gang.

The thing to be done now, was to procure the proof—no doubt a difficult matter to accomplish, but, Phenix was morally certain that, in time, he would run his game to earth.

Summoning the men, whom he had on the watch outside, he inquired which way the two had gone, but not a word to his subordinates did he say in regard to what had transpired; the detective kept his failures to himself; then, dismissing his men, he summoned the lady and two detectives ambushed in the cellar.

As Allister suspected, Miss Lodge had been a party to the plot, and, while apparently walking blindly into a trap, was skillfully leading Calderwood and Allister into the snare. The fall through the trap had been broken by a pile of mattresses underneath, and she had not received the slightest harm.

After he had dismissed the two officers, Phenix was obliged to confide to the lady that, for the present, they could not proceed further in the device which they had been working.

"We will think over some new idea," he announced; "these fellows are wary birds, and must be handled with extreme gentleness."

"What sort of a man is this Calderwood?" she asked, abruptly. "Is he the leading spirit, or but the tool of Allister?"

"Upon my word," Phenix replied, "you have asked a very difficult question, but, from what I have seen, I should say that Calderwood is the brains, and Allister the hands; that the first plans and the second executes."

"And who is responsible for the death of Ethelwold Calderwood, think you?"

"Well, I don't believe Calderwood is dead, at all," the detective answered. "I think it is all a conspiracy to swindle the insurance companies. It has been splendidly worked, and but for you no one would have suspected that there had been anything wrong about the matter. I don't know how the thing was done, but the rascals did succeed in pulling the wool over the eyes of the doctors most completely."

"You think, then, that Ethelwold Calderwood is yet alive?"

"I do, most certainly, although there isn't the slightest proof looking toward such a thing."

"And this other Calderwood must know all about it!"

"Undoubtedly; I have an idea that he planned the whole thing."

"I must see him then; I will have the truth from him!" the lady exclaimed, with flashing eyes.

Phenix laughed.

"I am afraid you won't find that so easy as you think," he rejoined. "Too much is at stake for him to reveal the secret until he is driven to the wall and the hangman's rope confronts him."

"I can at least try, and I will!" Miss Lodge persisted, spiritedly. "I will haunt this man like a shadow until I gain an interview, and when we are face to face, if he is anything like his brother I am sure I can guess from the way in which he speaks whether Ethelwold Calderwood is alive or dead."

Phenix looked a little incredulous but did not express his doubts. It would not do any harm for her to interview the man and she might, possibly, get a point or two, although not in the way she expected.

The lady departed at once upon her mission, while Phenix went to his office to dispossess himself of the odd character which he had assumed.

Straight up-town the lady bided, resolute upon the accomplishment of her purpose. Hitherto she had used fair means but now she was determined upon foul.

The porter who guarded the ladies' entrance of the hotel knew her very well, for she had been there so often lately on her errand that she had impressed herself upon his memory. The man, who was a quiet and rather sullen Irishman, she resolved to enlist into her service.

"I want to see Mr. Calderwood," she announced, as the door opened to her ring.

"Yis, ma'am; shore I know that, an' it is bad luck that yees do be afther la-ig. Ye never come here but he's sure to be out," the man replied.

"I have an idea that the gentleman does not want to see me and that half the time he is in when the reply is that he is out. Now, I want to see him on very particular business and I am

willing to pay any one who will arrange it so that I can see him."

The porter's eyes glistened at the word pay.

"I will give you five dollars if you will keep watch so that you will know when Mr. Calderwood comes in and goes to his room and will then conduct me there."

Five dollars was a good price for such a trivial service and the man jumped, figuratively speaking, at the offer.

"Oh, I will do it, ma'am!" he assured. "I am always ready to oblige a lady when I can. The gentleman will probably be home after dinner, and so if ye will be after coming this afternoon I will kape on the look-out for ye."

"Very well; you shall have five dollars for your trouble if you succeed."

She departed feeling fully satisfied that the five dollars had solved the difficulty and that she would succeed in getting speech with the Englishman without fail this time.

As the porter had expected, after dinner he saw Calderwood ascend the stairs toward his room.

The bird was fairly in the net, now, and it was the last chance, too, for Calderwood in order to escape the pursuit of this woman had just paid his bill and announced his intention of leaving the hotel, and he was just proceeding to pack up.

Hardly had the Englishman disappeared upstairs when Miss Lodega put in an appearance.

"You're in luck, ma'am; he's just gone to his room, 104," the porter advised.

The lady, placing a five-dollar bill in the man's hands, proceeded up-stairs, hot on the chase. Arriving at the door of 104 she found it ajar, and so, without warning, she pushed it open and walked into the apartment, much to Calderwood's astonishment.

They were face to face, at last!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EXAMINATION.

CALDERWOOD had selected a first-class legal firm to fight his battle for the insurance money, while on their part, too, the insurance men had chosen the best counsel to be had for money in all great Gotham; therefore, when these lawyers locked horns the chances were good for a splendid legal contest. But, everything would be fair and above board, for these eminent gentlemen of the law were above low trickery.

The opposing counsel had held a conference. Calderwood's men, acting under instructions from him—these lawyers, by the way, had been surprised at the tact, and the amount of legal knowledge, that the Englishman possessed—had represented to the other side that they had a strong case, and unless the insurance companies were in possession of facts not known to the plaintiff, it would be utter folly to carry the case into the courts, for they were sure of being beaten.

The defense treated this communication as squinting toward a compromise, and replied that they had a strong case—they could prove that there had been foul play, in the matter of Calderwood's death, to the satisfaction of any court in the world.

To this, Calderwood's men replied that they greatly regretted that their learned brothers should be laboring under false impressions in the premises, and furthermore said that it was plain to them that they, the defendants, were being grossly deceived in some important matters, and they suggested that a sort of private trial should be had, an examination of the proofs and witnesses, and if they did not succeed in proving to the satisfaction of all parties that the insurance people had no case then they would have nothing more to do with the affair.

This was really an astounding offer, and the learned gentlemen who made it were not exactly conscious of what they were doing, or how the affair was going to turn out. It was Calderwood's plan of action entirely. He had proposed the thing to the lawyers, and instructed them to submit it to the other side, and when they had questioned him in regard to how he expected to come out he had replied that the insurance people had no witnesses and no evidence that was worth a fig, and his idea was that, when they found out what an extremely weak case they had, as they would surely do upon examination, the insurance folks would never dare to go into court but would be glad to settle in some way.

The lawyers were somewhat astonished at the confident way in which Calderwood spoke as well as at the knowledge which he professed to have in regard to the evidence accessible to the insurance men and the witnesses which they relied upon, but, as he seemed so certain about the matter—so sure of success—they determined to go ahead. If he did know all the facts in the case, and if matters were as he stated—if the insurance men really were without proof, then of course it was the wisest thing to be done, for the companies were not foolish enough to rush into court without some chance of winning.

So the proposition was made and accepted, the insurance men pretending to be very confident in regard to the result. "When you see the evidence we have you will perceive at once that

your client's case hasn't got a leg to stand on, and that the quicker you give up the affair the better it will be for him and for his pocket," was their notice to Calderwood's counsel.

The day for the examination came. Four lawyers represented the companies; three Mr. Calderwood; while a fourth learned "brother" was to sit as referee. For witnesses, the defendants had Phenix, the detective, and Miss Lodega, while Calderwood was backed by the three doctors, who had attended the deceased, and by Allister.

The proceedings opened with the testimony of the doctors, who swore in the plainest manner that the man whom they had attended in his last illness, Ethelwold Calderwood, died of natural causes, and that there wasn't the slightest grounds for suspicion in regard to the illness or death.

A searching cross-examination did not succeed in causing either one of the three to vary in his statement. It was, therefore, evidence not lightly to be pushed aside, and Calderwood's lawyers couldn't see how the defendants were to disprove it.

Then Allister put in his evidence. As confidential man of business to the deceased gentleman of course he was well acquainted with all his affairs, and he gave a clear and straightforward statement of how Mr. Calderwood came to insure his life and all the particulars regarding his illness and death.

And his testimony stood the cross-examination, too, without being impaired in the least.

Calderwood's evidence was of little importance as he was not in the country at the time of the death.

This was all the testimony the prosecution cared to offer.

The defense was not at all discouraged though, for, upon a single witness they relied to set up fraud and falsehood, and this witness was Miss Helen Lodega.

They called the lady to the witness-stand and all within the room looked with curiosity upon the woman as she advanced.

Calderwood and Allister alone appeared as unconcerned as though they hadn't the slightest interest in the world in her testimony.

Miss Lodega's evidence was destined to be a great surprise, nevertheless, to the court.

"Now, miss, tell your story, please," said the senior lawyer.

And she did tell it—told a story so strange, and so utterly unexpected, that all within the room stared in amazement, Calderwood and Allister excepted. Even the veteran Joe Phenix was both amazed and disgusted.

"My name is Helen Lodega," she began; "I am a widow without children, thirty-four years old, and at the time of Mr. Ethelwold Calderwood's death I was engaged in his service as housekeeper. Mr. Calderwood was very kind to me, an utter stranger to him; I told him how hard a time I had had in this world, and he promised me that, as long as I staid with him and conformed to his wishes, I should not want for anything, and if he should be taken away from me he would see that I was well provided for in his will.

"I was all alone in the world, weak and trusting, and so I yielded, and agreed to do as he wished. His death soon followed; I was away from the mansion at that time, but I returned the moment I heard of it, for a great, although wicked idea had taken possession of my mind. I had resolved to announce myself as Mr. Calderwood's widow—to pretend that I had been secretly married to him, and so set up a claim to the estate left by him. In my ignorance I imagined that it was very large. I knew that there was a bequest for me in the will, and I thought that would be taken as proof that my statement in regard to the secret marriage would be believed. I knew that Mr. Calderwood had a brother in England, and that that gentleman would be the heir to Mr. Calderwood's estate. I hoped, by setting up my claim, to force the English Mr. Calderwood to settle a large sum upon me—in fact, to buy me off rather than enter into a lawsuit. But, when I learned through Mr. Allister that there was nothing left but the insurance money, I determined to pretend that there had been foul play, in order to force Mr. Calderwood to buy me off."

At this astounding statement the insurance lawyers and Phenix stared; never were men more taken by surprise.

"I am very sorry, gentlemen, for what I have done, and I humbly ask your pardon," she continued, addressing her conversation directly to the insurance lawyers, "and I also ask your pardon, Mr. Phenix, for having so grossly trifled with you, but I was desperate and kept blindly on in my falsehood, hoping that Mr. Calderwood would be compelled at last to buy my silence. But I cannot endure it any longer; I dare not take a false oath and give testimony that is not true. I do not know anything about Mr. Calderwood's death, and I was giving utterance to a falsehood when I declared that the body taken from Mr. Calderwood's grave was not Mr. Calderwood's remains. I knew that it was, but spoke false so as to make trouble, hoping to profit thereby. But, I am sorry now

for what I have done, and as a slight reparation I now make a full and humble confession."

To say that the insurance lawyers were astonished would be to put the case mildly. The woman was the witness upon whom they relied, and now, in the most complete manner, she had deserted them. Without her evidence they really had no ground to stand on at all.

If the woman's story was true, then she had been playing a most deep and desperate game; but, if she had spoken truth, then Calderwood had succeeded in buying her off. Either way it did not make much difference, for without her testimony in their favor, they could hardly hope to sustain their case.

There was no use of going any further at present; the insurance men required time for consultation, and to consult with their principals in regard to this surprising change in the state of affairs; so the conference broke up with the advantages decidedly in favor of Calderwood.

It looked now as if he was going to win in spite of everybody, Joe Phenix included.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MILLION IN "GOVERNMENTS."

OLD SALAMANDER thought of retiring from active business life. He had just made a deal by means of which he had got rid of two or three railroads in which he had been heavily interested, and so, one fine morning, he went down to Wall street, and ordered his broker to buy him a million dollars in Government bonds, the popular "4 per cents."

This idea had its origin in a sort of pride: the old man wanted it blazoned abroad that Mike Salamander had "taken stock" in his country to the tune of a million.

As was his boast, his wealth was not tied up in real estate, and when he wanted a trifle of money for an "operation"—two or three millions or so—he didn't have to run to some broker to raise funds by a mortgage on his real estate. "No, sir! he had the cash, and all he had to do was to write a check for it."

By a mistake the bonds were sent to the old man's house instead of to his bank, a proceeding which, when discovered by Salamander, on his return home, in the afternoon, made him swear as he was wont to do in the old time when he had been the boss of a river steamer. Not that he cared particularly about the matter, excepting that his orders had been disobeyed, and this annoyed him. Pride of power had caused him to look upon himself as a sort of king—a Cæsar, whose lightest nod was not to be disregarded with impunity.

The old man had not thought of danger; the idea that any one would dare to enter the house and rob him of his valuables never entered his mind. His luxurious, palace-like home was as well guarded as a fortress; every door and window was protected by a burglar alarm, and in the back yard, by the stables, two savage English mastiffs, that Salamander had imported at a cost of a hundred dollars each, were chained.

That evening the Salamanders had quite a deal of company, and the precious bonds were tossed carelessly upon the top of the piano as though these tokens of money were but so many old newspapers.

Every visitor of course opened his, or her, eyes widely at this display of wealth, much to Salamander's satisfaction, for this sort of purse-proud display was exactly what he liked.

Two or three of the callers expressed their apprehension that, if it were known there was such a sum of money in the house, in such portable and untraceable shape, there might be danger of visits from callers who were neither invited nor expected. And Calderwood, who happened to be one of the latest callers that evening, was particularly warm in his remonstrances.

"Come up-stairs in my sanctum, my boy," the old man said, "and see where I will put them to-night; then I think that you will change your opinion about the danger of any one getting at them even if the rascals succeeded in getting into the house, which is a clear impossibility, guarded as it is."

The "sanctum," as the old man termed it, was a small room right back of the old speculator's sleeping apartment; and in it a safe was built right into the wall so that only the front was visible.

Taking a very peculiar-shaped key from his pocket Salamander unlocked this safe and swung the door open so that his visitor could examine the wonderful strength of the whole.

"There, my boy, there is a safe that came from the frog-eaters across the water!" he exclaimed. "It beats anything ever made in this country; there's a lock that no man in America can pick, and I defy the best locksmith in the country to make a key to unlock it, either, although he comes right here and takes a mold of the keyhole. I know that that is so, for I lost my key, and although I tried a dozen men not one could make me another, and at last I had to send to Paris, to the original makers."

Calderwood expressed his wonder at this, of course, and after making quite a little call departed.

It was now about eleven o'clock, and the Salamanders prepared to retire for the night.

First the old man locked the bonds up carefully in the safe, and then partook of a very hearty luncheon and a couple of glasses of stiff brandy and water—much brandy and little water—as was his regular custom before retiring to rest. Miss Salamander contented herself with a glass of wine and retired.

Old Mike then disrobed for the night, but it was after midnight before he fell asleep. The key of the safe he hid away in a secure place, as was usual with him.

As a general thing the old man slept very soundly, being in robust health, but this night he had gorged himself with food, which made Salamander's slumbers uneasy ones.

For fully an hour he tossed and tumbled, relieving his mind by swearing or growling, but finally he dropped off into an uneasy sleep, and as he slept he dreamed—dreamed a diabolical dream that fairly caused the cold perspiration to start from every pore.

Again he was down in Wall street buying his bonds, and then the moment the transaction was completed he was turned into an invisible spirit whose duty it was to watch over the bonds.

He saw the broker messenger carefully do up the precious parcel and start on his errand up-town to deliver them at his, Salamander's, house, and, as the spirit, he became conscious of a tall, gentlemanly-appearing man, but with a peculiar look on his face, who was in the outer office when the bonds were bought, and now, like a bloodhound, followed on the track of the messenger.

The broker's man was never conscious that he was shadowed by this mysterious party clear from the Wall street office to the banker's mansion, but Salamander, as the spirit flying through the air, saw it all. Then there came a blank, and then, still as the spirit, the old man found himself watching the outside of his own house. It was after midnight and not a soul seemed to be stirring; yet stay! Three well-dressed men came along the street, men who looked like gentlemen, but Salamander, as the spirit, knew that they were minions of the night-burglars on the track of the bonds.

The three walked through the door of the mansion as though it were only paper; bolts and bars kept them not out. They went up the stairs inside the house and proceeded directly to the room where the safe was as though they were well acquainted with the premises. As the spirit still, Salamander followed.

One of the men lit the gas in the room; then Salamander saw that their faces were covered with black masks. The taller and most gentlemanly-looking of the three took a key from his pocket and applied it to the safe, and behold! the lock yielded; he reached in his hand, seized the bonds and—at this point with a sort of gasping groan the old man awoke.

He was covered with perspiration and was so impressed by the reality of the dream that he sprung from the bed, secured the loaded revolver which he always kept ready to his hand in the bureau drawer, right at the head of the bed—the gas was burning dimly so as to afford ample light—and then stole cautiously through the passage-way that led to the sanctum.

Old Salamander, big and burly, and wonderfully strong despite his years, had no thought of fear; his early life had been full of hard knocks, and the ease and luxuries of later years had not caused his strong right arm to forget its cunning, nor relaxed the vigor of the muscles of his iron frame.

The door of the other apartment was ajar; he pushed it open cautiously; and then, oh, wonder! the scene which had visited him in his slumber was before his eyes!

Three men, two tall and well built, the third a slender stripling, their faces covered with black masks, were within the room, gathered around the safe, and just as old Salamander came upon the scene one of them exclaimed in tones the old money-king recognized only too well.

"Good! the lock yields! I told you old Wayland could fit a key to any lock that ever was made. The bonds are ours and now we can be off for Europe and enjoy life like princes!"

Now that he saw there were three in the gang, Salamander regretted he had not summoned assistance when he had first awoke, but it was too late; and when he saw the fellow coolly reach into the safe and help himself to the precious sheets of paper which bore Uncle Sam's broad seal, he could not restrain himself, despite the odds.

"Surrender, you cursed rascals!" he cried, advancing with cocked revolver drawn and leveled. "Drop those bonds or I'll bore a hole right through you, every mother's son of you! Help, murder, robbers, thieves!"

The three men started in complete surprise, and like wild beasts at bay prepared to fight.

Their pistols flashed out in the gaslight, and Salamander, fully realizing that he had to deal with desperate men, and that it was either his life or theirs, at once opened fire upon them, and they, with equal readiness, returned it.

Assistance was near at hand, though. Skillful as were the night-birds, and skillfully as

they had planned their expedition, Phenix and his men had been on their track; and now, into the room where the pistol smoke curled in blue rings, rushed the detective and his squad, with drawn clubs.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PHENIX TRIUMPHS.

THREE of the bullets had found their billets when Phenix and his men arrived upon the scene of action.

Old Salamander was down, bleeding profusely, and yet only slightly wounded, as was soon discovered after an examination, but he had succeeded in disabling two of the marauders, though the third, the slight-framed youth, had escaped unhurt.

The leader of the band, the man who had unlocked the safe and clutched the bonds, lay prone upon his face, dead, shot right through the temple, and so desperate and determined had he been in the pursuit of prey, that even now he grasped within his hands a package of bonds.

The other fellow had been tumbled over by a shot through the chest, a severe wound, perhaps mortal.

The servants, headed by Miss Salamander, alarmed by the sound of fire-arms, came flocking upon the scene, and great was the outcry that arose when it was discovered that their master had been wounded by these midnight prowlers, but, to their joy it was ascertained that the old gentleman was but slightly injured.

The detectives, in the meantime, had taken possession of their prey. Phenix had a shrewd suspicion in regard to the birds whom he had been trailing so carefully, and so he was fully prepared for the discovery which was made when the masks were removed from the faces of the prisoners.

The man who had been shot dead by Salamander's steady hand—the leader of the burglars, was Marmaduke Calderwood, as he called himself, although Phenix had his suspicions that, in his time, the man had borne half a hundred names, for he had long ago made up his mind that Calderwood was an accomplished graduate of the English school—a man who had probably been an inmate of the prisons of England and continental Europe, a rogue of the first water—a rascal worthy to stand at the head of the fraternity.

The fellow who was wounded and gasping for breath might be mortally hurt, and then again might not be. When the black mask was removed there stood revealed Allister! Phenix's eyes sparkled as he looked upon his face, for he understood that this was the true leader of the Skeleton Keys—the hand that executed, the strong will that held the band together, although it was probably Calderwood who appeared as the actual captain, but who had held that office before Calderwood had arrived in this country. Phenix had his suspicions on this point and he expected now to be able to ascertain.

The third, the stripling, was indeed but a boy, when the mask was removed, and the face exposed to view; that is, all supposed the stripling to be a boy but Phenix, and he recognized in that boy Helen Lodgega, disguised.

The secret of the Skeleton Keys was no longer a secret to the sagacious detective; at last he had hunted down and destroyed the band, for now that the two leaders were in his hands, one dead and the other a prisoner, guilty of a crime which threw open the door of the State Prison wide before them, Phenix knew that he held the secret band in the hollow of his hand, and that, as an organization, it was no longer to be dreaded.

But the death of Ethelwold Calderwood—that great mystery into which, as yet, with all his skill, the detective had not been able to penetrate—could that be solved? Phenix felt certain that it could be, and that Helen Lodgega was the person who could do it.

Old Salamander, as soon as he recovered his senses, was loud in praise of the bold and timely rescue, and when he learned that he owed the service to the noted detective, Joe Phenix, he grabbed a five thousand dollar government bond and insisted upon the detective taking it, and would not hear of no for an answer.

"By gad, sir, if it had not been for you, this young devil here would have got away with the plunder, and perhaps murdered me into the bargain, for, as I was disabled and incapable of offering resistance, he could easily have finished me."

The old fellow had little idea that he was referring to a woman.

The detective departed with his prisoners, a coach having been provided so that Allister could be removed without endangering his life.

And, after he had safely lodged his night-birds in jail, Phenix summoned a squad of police and made a descent upon Red Henri's restaurant and arrested all whom he found within the house. He felt sure that he had

evidence enough now to break up the league which had so long laughed at the police's best efforts.

At last Joe Phenix held the Skeleton Keys hard and fast; the chase had been a long one, but, with the perseverance of a bull-dog, the detective had kept to his purpose until victory had crowned his endeavors.

Bright and early in the morning Phenix hunted up the district attorney and laid a certain matter before him; he had an idea in his mind and he wanted the official to assist him. This the lawyer readily agreed to do; the necessary papers were made out, and, armed with them, Phenix hurried away to see Miss Lodgega.

The detective felt convinced that this woman possessed the key to the whole mystery and that she could make everything plain if she chose to do so.

He did not believe that the woman had spoken truth when examined by the lawyers. As he said, in his decided way, to the insurance men, after they had retired beaten and dismayed from the conference: "Gentlemen, the woman spoke the truth the first time, and she has been lying now. She was married to Calderwood, or at least she believed she was, and that was the reason she was moving heaven and earth in the matter. That she so suddenly changed front is proof positive to me that she was got at, in some way."

The lawyers were inclined to believe this and they implored Phenix to go in and do his level best to unravel the mystery, otherwise the chances were great that the insurance companies would be obliged to pay the money on Calderwood's life, after all, and this was not at all to their notion.

In obedience to Phenix's orders, Miss Lodgega and Allister had been put in adjoining cells, and the prisoners who occupied these cells could easily communicate with each other if they chose so to do.

The detective knew this, and had placed a discreet man on the watch where he could overhear everything that passed between the two if they entered into communication.

All is fair in war, was the detective's motto.

Allister's wound had been examined by the surgeon and pronounced not to be a serious one, although likely to be painful for some time, and the proper dressings had been applied.

The confidential man of business was an old bird, and it did not take him long to notice the waste-pipe running from his cell into the adjoining one, so he immediately concluded that it afforded a means of communication with the prisoner in the next cell.

"Hallo! who are you, next door?" he asked, in a guarded tone so as not to attract attention if any of the prison officials happened to be hovering near, in the corridor without.

The woman recognized the voice coming from the waste-pipe at once.

"Is that you, Allister?" she asked.

"Yes," and he felt that fortune had favored him in affording this chance to communicate with Miss Lodgega. "Were you hurt in the struggle?"

"No, I escaped uninjured."

"You were more lucky than I, then, for I got a bullet in the chest, and although the doctor says there isn't any mortal danger I don't feel so sure of it."

"I am sorry for you and trust you will recover."

"How about Calderwood—did he escape or was he captured?"

"He is dead," and a series of broken sobs choked the woman's voice.

"Dead!" Allister was astounded for he had not calculated upon this.

"Yes, shot through the head and killed almost instantly," Miss Lodgega answered, in broken accents.

Allister was silent for a few moments, rapidly reviewing the situation of affairs in his mind. He knew that he was in a tight place, and that at last the persevering detective had got him fairly in his clutches, but he was not able to guess exactly how much Joe Phenix really did know. That, of course, he would learn in time. But the first thing to be done now was to secure the silence of the woman.

"Well, well, we must all die some time, I suppose," he remarked, "and now we must look after ourselves for we are in a hobble."

"I do not care what becomes of me," the woman replied, slowly. "I am weary of life and would to Heaven that the same bullet that laid Calderwood low had also stricken me."

"Oh, come; you mustn't talk that way; we will get out of this mess, some way. I have plenty of powerful friends, plenty of money and influence, and after we get out of this scrape I will provide for you; only keep a still tongue in your head and don't breathe a word of our secret."

"John Allister, I would sooner starve than take a penny of your money!" she exclaimed, fiercely. "You are the tempter whose arts have brought about this ruin, and if my words would place you on the scaffold only too gladly would I speak."

The sound of footsteps without here interrupted the conversation.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
THE WOMAN SPEAKS.

It was the detective Phenix coming to visit Miss Lodega. The watcher in the passage who had not allowed a single word of the conversation between the two to escape him, instantly reported to his chief what had passed between the two, and Phenix smiled in a manner which plainly showed that he was completely satisfied with the way things were progressing.

All he feared was that Allister had acquired such an influence over the woman as to be able to hold her silent as the grave in regard to the secrets which the detective believed she possessed.

But now that he was assured she was not on friendly terms with Allister, he felt certain she would speak, for he could not conceive of any reason why she should wish to remain silent.

The detective was eager to get at the heart of the Calderwood mystery, an affair which had puzzled him more than any other in all his experience. He was anxious to know how near he had come to guessing the truth.

Entering the woman's cell, he greeted her kindly, and at once proceeded to the business upon which he came.

"Miss Lodega, probably you are now aware that you have become mixed up with one of the worst bands of desperadoes which has ever infested New York. Last night's work is amply sufficient to send both you and your companion to Sing Sing for a long term of years, but, as I am desirous of getting at the bottom facts of this mystery of Calderwood, and believing that you can reveal all, I have been to the District Attorney and got him to accept you as a witness for the State, for we want to completely root out this league known as the Skeleton Keys, and we feel satisfied that, with your aid, we can do so; so, if you will accept the terms, and turn State's evidence, as a reward we guarantee you a full pardon."

"Gladly will I accept," the woman answered, immediately, a thankful expression upon her face; and then she related a most wonderful tale, which we will rehearse in brief:

Ethelwold Calderwood was an English rogue, forced with Allister, who had been his pal, to fly to this country after a stupendous robbery in London. The pair had gotten away safely with their plunder, and after arriving in New York, perceiving what a chance there was for an organized band, had formed the league of the Skeleton Keys.

Calderwood being a dashing, accomplished fellow, and having plenty of money, had succeeded in gaining an *entrée* into very good society, an opportunity which he used to pick up information in regard to big hauls of plunder. Then he had got into the stock market, and for a time prospered so greatly that he took but little interest in the doings of the band, which Allister attended to. But at last reverses came, for, clever rogue as the Englishman was, he found the bulls and bears of Wall street more than his equal in wit. He lost all he had gained, and being pushed for money a brilliant idea came into his head. He determined to bleed the insurance companies; so he insured his life for a large sum.

One of the members of the band, as it so happened, bore a striking resemblance to Calderwood, and having caught a violent cold on a night marauding expedition, was near to death; in fact, it was certain that the man had only a few hours to live. This man was carried secretly to the country house at the Highlands; then Calderwood took to his bed and pretended to be ill. The doctors were called in and saw the other man in place of Calderwood; of course not being acquainted with Calderwood it was impossible for them to discover the deception.

This man they attended as Calderwood, and as Calderwood he died and was buried, but when Miss Lodega returned and announced her intention of looking into the matter, the plotters became alarmed, for they knew that she would surely discover that the body was not Calderwood, if it was exhumed, so they dug the body up and disfigured the face, and on that occasion, Calderwood, who was in charge of the party, uttered the sarcasm which had so astounded the old grave-digger, "Dig here; my body is not more than five feet deep," and the man, hearing the voice, at once jumped to the natural supposition that it came from the grave.

The one weak point in the affair was Calderwood's infatuation for Helen Lodega. He fell in love with the woman the moment she entered the house, and determined to have her despite the risk; so, unknown to Allister, who would never have permitted such an act of madness, and aided by the band, he arranged the secret and fraudulent marriage. Then he got the woman to go off on a journey, thinking that when she returned, after the false death, the legacy bequeathed to her would satisfy and quiet her. But the woman really loved the man who had so cruelly betrayed her, and that love urging her on to avenge his supposed murder, contributed to the failure of the well-laid scheme. She had acted as a faithful ally of

Phenix's until she managed to procure an interview with the supposed brother, Marmaduke, and then, in spite of the changes which he had made in his personal appearance, and which had deceived all other eyes, she recognized that Marmaduke was Ethelwold—that, instead of two brothers, there was but one man in the case.

Finding that he was discovered he confessed all and begged her to join hands with him, swearing that he would legally make her his wife, and this was the reason she so completely astonished everybody but her pals, on the day of the examination when she retracted all her former statements.

And now that the mystery—a mystery no longer—stands revealed, our tale is done.

A few words in regard to some of the characters that have figured in this over true tale may not be amiss.

Old Salamander soon recovered from his slight wound and enjoys nothing more than the recital of the tale of how, single-handed, he overcame three desperate burglars, but he always forgets to mention that, only for the timely aid of Phenix and his men the affair might have had a different termination.

Miss Salamander, after having so narrowly escaped twice becoming the prey of the same swindler, yielded to the dictates of her heart and wedded the artist, who, by the skillful watch which he kept upon the arch rogue, agreeably to the promise which he had given Phenix, materially contributed to the success of the detective.

And Eldorado Wayland, the old locksmith's daughter, who too came so near to falling into Calderwood's clutches—the rascal had a keen eye for beautiful girls—in time forgot her disappointment and blessed the suit of Paul, her father's right-hand man, who had served long and patiently for the prize.

Thanks to the information obtained from Helen Lodega, the band of the Skeleton Keys was entirely broken up. A dozen crimes were now easily traced to Red Henri's door, and that worthy was sent up the river to do the State some service. And as for Allister he was convicted without the jury leaving their seats.

The trials over Phenix inquired of Miss Lodega what she proposed doing.

"Going out into the world to battle again for my scanty living, for, Heaven help me! I have no friends!"

The detective was visibly affected; he had need of just such a woman as she had proved herself to be, and he at once made her an offer.

"Miss Lodega, in my private detective business I often need the aid of a woman, and you will fill the bill exactly. Become a member of my force. I will pay a liberal salary which I am sure you will earn."

With tears in her eyes the woman accepted the offer.

At some future time, fate willing, we may relate how useful this female detective proved to our hero, Joe Phenix

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